

# NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL

## Monterey, California



### THESIS

**THE DECISION TO ALLOW MILITARY WOMEN INTO  
COMBAT POSITIONS: A STUDY IN POLICY AND POLITICS**

by

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June 2000

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POSITIONS: A STUDY IN POLICY AND POLITICS**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

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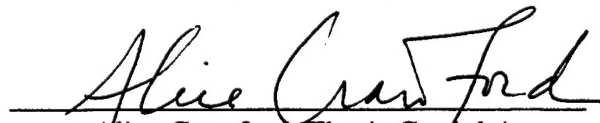
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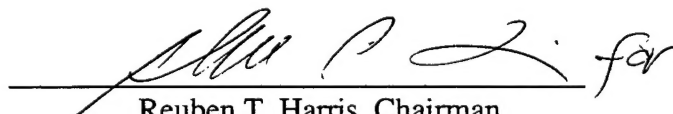
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## ABSTRACT

Until 1991, combat aviation exclusion laws barred women in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force from being assigned to aviation squadrons that flew or trained for combat missions. The Congressional decision to rescind such laws and, subsequently, the laws banning women from combat ships in the Navy was of great significance in the history of the United States military and the nation as a whole. Studying the Congressional proceedings that allowed military women to assume such roles leads to a more in-depth understanding of how difficult or sensitive decisions have been made in the past and will likely be made in the future. The focus of this thesis is two-fold. First, the thesis reviews the history of women in combat and the major issues involved. Second, through research and interviews with key individuals, it examines the Congressional decision and resulting actions. Interviews with a former member of Congress, legislative aides, high-ranking Navy and Army leaders, Department of Defense officials, and women's rights activists revealed certain consistencies in perceptions concerning the circumstances and events that led to removal of the laws excluding military women from combat. Interviewees generally agreed that exclusionary laws were lifted in 1991 due to political and societal influences, the experiences of women in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm, successful lobbying by activists, and legislative procedure. Recommendations are offered for future research.

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

### **A. BACKGROUND**

In 1991, the United States Congress reviewed and reconsidered the combat aviation exclusion laws that barred women in the Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force from being assigned to aviation squadrons that had combat missions. Rescinding the combat exclusion laws would have a great impact on the history and traditions of the United States military and of the nation as a whole. As Senator John Warner (R-VA) commented during a debate on the Senate floor, "We are dealing with one of the most important moments in the history of the Armed Forces of the United States" (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11423). The decision to repeal such laws and, subsequently, the laws banning women from combat ships reflected a complete shift in beliefs traditionally held by Americans concerning a woman's role in society, the role of men as protectors of women, and certain differences in physical capability between men and women.

### **B. PURPOSE**

#### **1. Objectives**

This study reviews and evaluates the decision to rescind laws excluding women from combat aviation. It is believed that there has been no previous examination of the decision, and such a review is beneficial to see how Congress handled a sensitive topic with far-reaching social, military, and readiness implications. The timing of the research

is appropriate because the sensitivities have been reduced, but individuals who were involved are still able to relate their views on how the law and policies changed.

Major influences on the decision are analyzed: policies, history, politics, and theories. After interviewing key people such as a former member of Congress, legislative aides, high-ranking Navy and Army leaders, officials in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, and women's rights activists, the study identifies consistencies and inconsistencies in both opinion and fact. These lead to a more in-depth understanding of how the woman-in-combat issue was resolved in Congress and in the nation and add insight as to how other difficult or sensitive decisions have been made in the past and will likely be made in the future.

## **2. Research Questions**

### **1. Historical background**

- a. What is the historical background of women in the United States Armed Forces?
- b. What is the historical background of women in combat?
- c. What are the precedents of combat service by women in the Armed Forces?

### **2. Rescinding the combat aviation exclusion laws**

- a. What were the topics of debate presented in Congress?
- b. How did Congressional debates influence the decision?
- c. Was there evidence (voting records, interviews) of Party distinctions or influences on the Congressional votes?

- d. What were the recommendations of the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces and how did these recommendations influence the decision, if at all?
- e. Did the experiences of women in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm have an impact on the decision?
- f. What influenced individual members of Congress, the Secretary of Defense, the Service Chiefs, and the President to support or oppose the legislation?

## **C. SCOPE AND ORGANIZATION**

### **1. Scope and Limitations**

The scope of this thesis encompasses the Congressional decision to repeal combat aviation exclusion laws, the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, and, to a limited extent, the actions subsequent to the Congressional decision. Specifically, the study focuses on how the decision was made: background, politics involved, chronology and historical narrative, and constituency influences on members of Congress. Because of practical limitations, the study does not examine consequences and problems resulting from the legislation or whether the decision was appropriate for the military, women, or the nation as a whole.

### **2. Limitations and Assumptions**

Interviews conducted in the course of this research were thorough and provide a strong cross-sectional representation of key persons involved; however, the study is



limited by the inaccessibility of members of Congress, past and present, and study constraints that prevented interviewing more than one person per area of responsibility. The presentation of this research assumes a basic understanding of legislative matters and the military's organization.

### **3. Organization**

The thesis is organized to cover five main areas. The Background and Literature Review (Chapter II) discusses the historical background of women in combat and in the United States armed forces, as well as the following major issues that arise from a debate on women in combat: pro and con arguments, Operation Desert Storm, Tailhook and equal opportunity, socialization and society's views, parenting and gender issues, and readiness matters. Chapter III contains a discussion of the methodology of the study, delineating research methods and interview procedures. The next chapter, Congressional Proceedings, outlines the debates in Congress, topics addressed by the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, and pertinent political issues. Chapter V covers the research interviews: summaries, trends, and interpretation and analysis. The final chapter presents the summary, conclusions of the thesis, and recommendations for further research.

## **II. BACKGROUND/LITERATURE REVIEW**

The historical background of women in combat and women in the United States armed forces provides an orientation to the progression of women's roles in the military. Following the historical background is a discussion of key issues that divided proponents and opponents of allowing women in combat. These include the following subjects: the performance of military women in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm; equal opportunity issues; socialization and society; and parenting, gender, and military readiness issues. Studying these topics helps explain the questions facing members of Congress as they debated whether or not to remove the barriers preventing women from serving in combat billets.

### **A. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF WOMEN IN COMBAT**

The roles of women as warriors, citizens, mothers, leaders, and military professionals have been debated, tested, defined and redefined for centuries. Philosophers, authors, military members, countries' leaders, and countless others have all had thoughts about the subject of women in fighting roles. Women themselves have used cunning or personal initiatives to place themselves in "harm's way"; however, up until the past 50 years, those actions have been more for reasons of religion or defense of their homes than reasons of destruction or war-fighting (Jones, 1993).

Written over two centuries ago, the tradition of epics and tragedies in literature offer similar beliefs about the role of women in society. Sophocles' Antigone and Homer's Iliad both lead to the conclusion that women attempt to maintain a domestic

society, and their solution to war would be an eradication of politics to keep a domestic and an isolationist focus (Elshtain, 1987). Silently and faithfully, women stood vigil in the home while men were fighting battles. Writing just a short time later, however, Plato argues that women should be expected to take on their full share of civic responsibilities. When a state goes to battle, he comments in The Republic, men and women should share in the responsibility of that state's defense (Eitelberg, 1990). Plato and Socrates, unlike Aristotle, believed that all human beings are a part of mankind, even women, foreigners, and slaves. Because they were on equal footing in issues of politics and morality, human beings shared a duty to defend their nation (Van Doren, 1991).

Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Fredrich Nietzsche thought that, in the context of war, a woman's role was to support the state by providing sons to fight and a home for sons and husbands upon their return. In Emile, Rousseau offers a pointed example of a woman-citizen: "A Spartan woman had five sons in the army and was awaiting news of the battle. A Helot arrives; trembling, she asks him for the news. 'Your five sons were killed.' 'Base slave, did I ask you that?' 'We won the victory.' The mother runs to the temple and gives thanks to the Gods. This is the female citizen" (Elshtain, 1997, p.41). There was much opposition to this type of view, but none was provided by Nietzsche, who said: "Men should be trained for war and women for recreation of the warrior; all else is folly" (as cited in Eitelberg, 1990). Clausewitz, however, around the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, argued that public opinion was one of the most essential elements of war. Taking this one step further, if the public supported women in combat, as they did in 1991, Clausewitz himself might have been amenable to the idea (Elshtain, 1997).

Women themselves have fought for a number of reasons, but until recent history the primary motives were religion and medical assistance. One of the most famous women warriors was Joan of Arc. In 1429, during the Hundred Years' War, she convinced Dauphin (later Charles VII, King of France) that she had a personal divine mission to save France. Theologians approved her claims, and she was allowed to lead troops into battle, successfully defeating the English. After the war, Charles opposed further action against the English. Joan of Arc took it upon herself to launch a military operation at Compiègne, where she was captured and sold to the English. Accused and convicted of heresy and of wearing masculine dress, she was burned at the stake in 1431. Throughout her lifetime, she maintained allegiance first to God; her fighting was not out of any civic duty pressed upon her by either men or women. The Catholic Church has since professed her innocence and declared her a saint (Joan of Arc, Saint, 1995).

Florence Nightingale became famous for her work in the Crimean War, 1854-1856. Volunteering her services, she assumed the direction of all medical forces at the war front. With virtually no regard for her own personal safety and her proximity to battle lines, she and her staff aided wounded soldiers and helped the British achieve victory. In 1907, she became the first woman to receive the British Order of Merit. Florence Nightingale's actions reflected British society's willingness to risk the lives of women to receive the benefits of their presence at the war front. This willingness was incredibly rare but slowly gained favor as the 1900s progressed.

Among nations, Great Britain has historically led the way in employing women in combat positions, along with Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, and Denmark

(Snyder, 1991). British women have served aboard ships and worked in cannon crews. They have nursed and given birth at sea. Their contributions were not recognized or organized, however, until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, around the time of Florence Nightingale (Jones, 1993). The other countries opening combat positions to women have done so in the past 30 years. Although rigorous physical tests keep the majority of women out of the infantry, these countries allow women to serve in most other combat specialties (Snyder, 1991). In the early days of female integration in Canada, women had an incredibly high dropout rate in the infantry, but they have since been successfully integrated into both the Canadian Air Force and the Canadian Navy (Eitelberg, 1990). In none of these countries, however, have women been tested in actual combat.

Russia and Israel appear to be the only countries to date that have sent women into combat, and there are important lessons to glean from their experiences. During World War II, the Soviet Union formed two bomber regiments and one fighter regiment in which women filled all aircrew and support positions (Bateman, 1991). As Poyer (1986, p. 55) explains in his article "G.I. Jane: Should Women Be Allowed to Fight?:" "Women participated with their male counterparts in every resistance organization in occupied Europe; they were captured, tortured, and executed by the Nazis in the same manner and proportion as men." And the experience of Nadya Popova, a Russian bomber pilot during the war, would also challenge the assertion that women have never fought in combat. She was not a citizen of an Allied country, but she was a woman who fought with men. She said,

We flew combat missions each night. With up to three hundred kilos of bombs strapped to our wings we took off an average of fifteen times a night, bombing railways, bridges, supply depots and troop positions that were heavily fortified with anti-aircraft guns....I could see burning planes crashing with my girlfriends in them (Saywell, 1985, p. 144).

During Israel's War of Independence, Palmach, a semi-clandestine volunteer organization, provided the core of the Israel Defense Force (IDF). Palmach was a guerrilla militia originally designed to protect Palestine from Arab attacks. Palmach women often accompanied men on missions, and this carried over into the IDF. The practical experiences of the 1948 Arab-Israeli War led IDF leadership to conclude "that the dangers of women in combat outweighed the benefits – including commitment to an abstract concept of equality" (Owens, 1992, p. 35). The [United States] Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces (1992) published the International Trip Report, which revealed that, during the 1948 Israeli conflict, male Israeli soldiers tried to protect women, instead of continuing their attacks, out of fear of what would happen to the women if they were captured. Unit morale was arguably damaged when men saw women killed and maimed on the battlefield. After the war, Israel's Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, stated that placing women in combat had violated the Jewish concept of womanhood and the status of women as mothers (Owens, 1992). As a result of the experiences, women have been barred from combat in Israel since 1950. Although they are still conscripted to this day, they serve in support billets and do not fight on the front lines (Senate Record Vote Analysis, 1991; Jones, 1993; Luddy, 1991 [On-Line]).

The history of women in the United States armed forces is covered in the next section, but it is important to note the Senate's reaction to Israel's experiences. Senators attempting to slow the opening of combat billets to women argued that:

Very little information is available on how well women could perform in a modern fighting force. The Israeli experience is often mistakenly advanced by our colleagues as proof that women perform well in combat. In Israel, in 1948, severe manpower shortages led to the drafting of women to fight in the war for liberation. Based on this experience, Israel subsequently determined that women are not qualified to fight, and, although it still drafts women for support positions, it has never since allowed women to serve in combat positions.

While the Israeli experience does not prove that women are capable of serving in combat positions, it does not disprove it either. Times have changed. The U.S. Armed Forces are the most technologically advanced in the world, and it may well be that recent advances have made it possible for patriotic women to serve the U.S. in various combat roles. They should not be allowed to serve if the problems they create outweigh the benefits, but they should not be excluded if they prove an asset.

Before any decision is made, the only rational course is to objectively determine what the effect would be of having women assigned to combat roles. No conclusive data exists... (Senate Record Vote Analysis, 1991, p. 2).

Women's roles in society, government, and the military date back thousands of years and have covered an entire spectrum: They have been asked to profess their citizenship by remaining at home, offering their sons and welcoming their husbands; they have fought for medical and religious reasons; they have been allowed to serve on ships and in armies, even in battle. As noted above, however, history does not offer many conclusions about the appropriateness of allowing women to serve in modern-day combat. Societies change, roles are constantly redefined, and arguments are won and lost. In the relatively short history of the United States, women have secured rights for control of property, equality of opportunity in education and employment, suffrage, and

sexual freedom. These gains notwithstanding, the role of women in the military has taken much longer to be ironed out.

## **B. UNITED STATES HISTORY**

The United States has a long history of participation by women in its armed forces. According to numerous sources, women have taken part in every American military crisis since the Revolutionary War (Bruer, 1997; DePauw, 1998, Beck, 1991). More recently, an estimated 75 percent of women in the military in Vietnam were subjected to combat conditions, and women were involved in Grenada (1983), Libya (1986), the Persian Gulf (1987), Panama (1989), Somalia (1992-1994), and Operation Desert Storm (1991) (Stiehm, 1996; Congressional Research Service, 1998; Bruer, 1997).

The history of women in the United States military begins in the Revolutionary War, when a woman nicknamed "Molly Pitcher" (so named because she put down her pitcher of water, for aiding the soldiers, and instead took up arms to fight alongside them) held a mortar position until reinforcements could arrive for injured American soldiers. Although her true identity is in question, eyewitnesses documented her heroics and she came to represent women who served with the Continental Army (Holm, 1982). For a number of years after the Revolution, women served with armies as cooks, seamstresses, and laundresses, but once again found themselves involved in conflict (DePauw, 1998). In the Civil War, for example, women spied for both the Confederate and Union armies. Mrs. Rose O'Neal Greenhow was arrested and even imprisoned for supplying information to the Confederate army (Holm, 1982).



From the Civil War until just prior to World War II, women served in the military primarily as nurses and in support roles. The Army Nurse Corps was established in 1901 and the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908 (Dean, 1997). In 1917, Army nurses were sent to Europe on a limited basis. Heavier than expected casualties among men caused the War Department in the States to agree to let Army units employ women for clerical jobs, therefore freeing more men to fight on the front lines (Bruer, 1997).

Despite their integration and successes in limited capacities, women were never officially militarized until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1942, the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC) was established, granting women formal military status. They served to free men for combat positions; they attended a basic indoctrination training and were schooled to become clerks, mechanics, typists, cooks, and drivers (Bruer, 1997). Two months later, the Navy established its own version of the WAAC, the Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Service, or WAVES. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt was influential in recognizing the value of women pilots and, in a 1942 statement, she spoke of the great amount of talent that was being wasted. Soon thereafter, the Women's Auxiliary Flying Squadron (WAFS) was established (Bruer, 1997).

In 1943 the Women's Army Corps (WAC) took the place of the WAAC so that women would not be known as "Auxiliary." Under General Henry H. (Hap) Arnold, the Army Air Forces tapped into the workforce of the WAC and expressed a need for "Air-WACs." Except for combat and flying schools, all Army Air Force training was opened to women, and approximately 40,000 women served as Air-WACs and were stationed at air bases all over the world (Holm, 1982). More than 1,070 women were hired as Civil

Service pilots and formed the Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASP), but they were not granted full military benefits until 1977 (Holm, 1982; Bateman, 1991; Dean, 1997).

Women's contributions to the war effort did not go unnoticed, but their acceptance was inconsistent. As DePauw (1998, p. 248) writes, "Despite the fact that American nurses were in the hottest combat zones, the belief that women were not sent into harm's way, so essential to the myth of war as an exclusively male activity, persisted among Americans." Due to the success of the WAAC and the WAC and their involvement in the war, a permanent place for women in the military was established through the Women's Armed Services Act of 1948. The purpose of the act was the mobilization of women to be ready "in the event of a future national emergency and [to meet] the military's more immediate requirement for volunteers" (Holm, 1982, p. 113).

Women comprised less than one percent of the military forces in the Korean conflict and were used primarily as nurses. To heighten awareness and recruitment of women, the Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) was established in 1951. DACOWITS still exists today to advise the Secretary of Defense on military women's issues (Dean, 1997). Despite reluctance to send women to Southeast Asia during the Vietnam conflict, the need for nurses eventually caused women to serve close to the battlefield on a regular basis (Holm, 1982).

The early- to mid-1970s saw a great change in the numbers and roles of women in the military. The All-Volunteer Force was established in 1973 and led to increased recruitment and enlistment of women. The Equal Rights Amendment raised public awareness of women's roles and pressured Congress to continue expanding them.

Integration of enlisted women was slow but steady, and three of the four services currently conduct integrated basic training.

Female officer training, however, progressed more smoothly. In 1969, the Air Force opened its Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC) to women on a test basis, and the success of women eventually led to co-gender commissioning in all the services. In 1975, Congress mandated that women be allowed to attend the service academies, toppling the final barrier for women to gain a commission. Women officers were also gradually integrated into all staff and non-combat positions. They were allowed to attend the senior joint and service staff colleges, the National War College, the Industrial College of the Armed Forces, the Joint Armed Forces Staff College, and the Air War College (Holm, 1982; Bruer, 1997; Dean, 1997).

In the 11 years between 1967 and 1978, women made relatively fast progress in the military in terms of status, representation, and job availability. The ceiling on numbers of women was lifted (1967), followed by the admittance of women into ROTC billets (1972), overseas duty stations (1972), flight training (1973), the Service Academies (1976), co-educational basic training (1977), Air Force missile launch silos (1977), and sea duty (1978). After 1978, women regularly participated in military operations and found themselves well integrated in everyday missions. The Army's Chief of Staff, General Bernard W. Rogers adequately summed up women's roles during the 1975-1991 period when he said:

Qualified women now have the opportunity to serve in all but a few specific combat units and combat specialties....Some people believe that women soldiers will not be deployed in the event of hostilities: that they are only to be part-time soldiers – here in peace, gone in war....Women are an essential part of the force; they will deploy with their units and they will serve in the skills in which they have been trained....

The first considerations in the assignment of women in the Army have been, and will continue to be, the mission of the Army itself, and the uniquely demanding nature of Army service in wartime. Within that context, women can make many important contributions; indeed, they are doing so now (Rogers, 1978, p. 1).

This is a strong testament to the progress women have made in the military since the early days of Molly Pitcher and Rose O'Neal Greenhow.

The 1990s saw a further expansion in the roles of women in the military. Before legislation and policy were changed in 1991 to allow women into combat aviation billets, women were subject to various assignment guidelines. Army policy banned them from direct combat branches and Apache helicopters; but all other areas, including infantry support and Black Hawk helicopters, were open to women. The Air Force based its policy on the combat exclusion laws: Air Force women, until 1991, were allowed to fly tankers and other support aircraft, but not combat aircraft. The Navy interpreted the laws slightly differently, allowing women to fly "combat" aircraft in training and support squadrons (but not to deploy in Fleet combat squadrons), serve on combat logistics ships, and hold almost any shore-based job. And, in the Marine Corps, women were excluded from all combat billets or units.

After legislation was passed to repeal combat exclusion laws, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin made policy changes in 1993. Since the changes, the Navy still excludes women from the elite SEAL (Sea, Air, and Land) units, submarines,

minesweepers, and patrol crafts. Sixty-two percent of Marine Corps jobs and 67 percent of Army jobs remain closed to women because of the Risk Rule previously defined by Secretary Aspin in 1988. Specifically, the Risk Rule stated that “*noncombat* units should be open to women unless the risk of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture is equal to or greater than that experienced by associated *combat* units in the same theater of operations” (Hooker, 1991, p. 87). A comprehensive timeline of events affecting women in the military, up to and including the opening of combat surface vessels to women, is outlined below:

- 1948 - Congressman Carl Vinson introduces combat exclusion legislation as part of the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act.
  - Congress passes the Women’s Armed Services Integration Act to establish a permanent but separate women’s corps, which limits enlisted women to two percent of enlisted strength, women officers to ten percent of enlisted female strength, and the pay grade of female officers to O-5 (lieutenant colonel in the Army, Marine Corps, and Air Force; commander in the Navy).
- 1951 - Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) is established by Congress. DACOWITS is comprised of 30-40 men and women who advise the Secretary of Defense on policies and matters relating to women in the services.
- 1956 - Combat Exclusion Law is codified in Title 10, U.S. Code.

- 1964 - Title VII of the Civil Rights Act establishes rules against discrimination by employers. The issue of whether Title VII applies to the military was not resolved (Snyder, 1991).
- 1967 - Public Law 90-130 removes the two-percent ceiling for women in the military and the maximum grade limitation.
- 1972 - Equal Rights Amendment is approved by Congress.
- Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) admits women.
  - Navy makes plans for women to be assigned to overseas duties.
- 1973 - All-Volunteer Force is established; the draft ends.
- Army and Navy open flight training to women.
  - Supreme Court (*Frontiero v. Richardson*) rules that dependents of military women should receive the same benefits as those of male members.
- 1974 - DOD rescinds policy that involuntarily separated pregnant women.
- Women are allowed to enlist in all four services at the same age as men (18) without parental consent. The age for women had previously been 21.
- 1975 - Stratton Amendment to the Defense Authorization Bill directs the Service Academies to accept women.
- 1976 - Service Academies accept women into the class of 1980.
- Air Force opens flight training to women.

- 1977 - The Secretary of the Army issues a combat exclusion policy prohibiting the assignment of women to combat arms.
- Army begins co-educational basic training.
  - Air Force assigns women to the Titan Launch program.
- 1978 - Public Law 95-485 abolishes the Women's Army Corps, fully integrating women into the Regular Army.
- Navy assigns first women to sea duty aboard non-combat ships.
- 1979 - President Carter proposes a repeal of the combat exclusion laws. During Congressional hearings the proposal was "abruptly scuttled" by the opposition of Navy and Marine Corps leaders (Holm, 1991, p. 70).
- 1981 - The U.S. Supreme Court, in *Rostker v. Goldberg*, upholds the constitutionality of a male-only draft using combat exclusion as a basis for its decision.
- 1985 - Air Force assigns women to the Minuteman and Peacekeeper ballistic missile silos.
- 1988 - Risk Rule is defined: "The risk rule states that *noncombat* units should be open to women unless the risk of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture is equal to or greater than that experienced by associated *combat* units in the same theater of operations" (Hooker, 1991, p. 87).
- 1989 - Servicewomen participate in Panama in Operation Just Cause.
- 1990-91 - Over 40,000 women participate in Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm in the North Arabian Gulf.

- 1991 - Amendment No. 948 is introduced in Congress by Senators William Roth, Jr. (R-DE) and Edward Kennedy (D-MA), asking for full repeal of combat exclusion laws.
- Amendment No. 949 is introduced in Congress by Senators John Glenn (D-OH), John McCain (R-AZ), Sam Nunn (D-GA), and John Warner (R-VA) asking for a temporary repeal of aviation combat exclusion laws to study the issue more thoroughly.
  - Congress passes the Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 102-190), repealing the aviation combat exclusion laws (Title 10, U.S. Code, Section 6015).
  - Public Law 102-190 creates the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces.
  - Incidents of sexual harassment occur at the Navy's Tailhook Convention.
- 1992 - The Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces presents its final report to the President, recommending that aviation and ground combat jobs remain closed to women but that combat ships be opened.
- 1993 - Congress repeals laws prohibiting women on combat vessels (Public Law 103-60).
- Secretary of Defense Aspin directs the military to open combat ships and combat aircraft to women.



- Secretary Aspin replaces the Risk Rule with a new definition of ground combat “that bars women from units that engage the enemy with weapons on the ground while exposed to hostile fire and that involve substantial probability of direct physical contact with hostile forces” (Peach, 1994, p. 158).

1994 - 260,000 more positions are opened to women as a result of Secretary Aspin’s 1993 directive.

1995 - The USS *Dwight D. Eisenhower* becomes the first combat vessel to sail with women.

Since 1995, women have continued to serve in all military specialties not designated as “ground combat.” Exceptions to this include Navy ships with limited berthing space, such as submarines, minesweepers, and patrol craft.

## **C. MAJOR ISSUES**

### **1. Pro Arguments**

The debate over whether women should serve in combat essentially began in this country when women were first allowed in the United States armed forces. Even before the law was changed in Congress, women had been at significant risk in major U.S. military actions. Proponents of the legislation offered many arguments, which covered an entire spectrum from military necessity to equal rights. These are outlined below, and most are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

1. Military necessity and efficiency requires women in combat billets.

Since 1973, when the military found itself in a post-Vietnam, post-conscription draw-down, recruitment and retention have been difficult. "Today, as in 1973, the military would be hard pressed to meet enlisted quotas or force requirements without women" (Gruenwald, 1997, p. 1962). Opening combat billets to women would aid in both retention and recruitment because of the new career opportunities that would be available. Adoption of the All-Volunteer Force in 1973 led to the military's dependence on women, which means it is less efficient to keep them out of combat (Stiehm, 1996). MGEN Jeanne Holm, USAF (Ret.) (1991, p.69) states: "The growing use of women in defense was not [a social] experiment but a military manpower necessity – the need to achieve a quality force of volunteers and the inability to do it without women." And Senator Roth opined during a Senate Armed Services Committee hearing that "flexibility is impeded and excellence is short changed [because of the barrier]" (National Defense Authorization, 31 July, 1991, p. 11413). Proponents suggested that, without expanded opportunities for women, the military would be inflexible, understaffed, and have less-than-optimal readiness.

## 2. Women are fully qualified to fight in combat units.

There is no compelling evidence that women are psychologically unfit to be in combat, and beliefs to the contrary are "rooted in prejudice rather than observation," wrote one squadron leader (Jones, 1993, p. 39). Women have proven their worth and ability in the past, and as John Stuart Mill said in the 1880s, "men do not have a monopoly on patriotism" (Stiehm, 1996; Elshtain, 1987). Assigning the most qualified person to a job, regardless of gender, has some benefits. It allows each military member

to take on citizenship responsibilities equally by utilizing his or her own strengths, and it adds to the country's defense capability and, subsequently, to the security of the United States. As Senator Roth observes: "It is not about women pilots flying combat missions, but about the *best* pilots flying combat missions" (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11413 [italics added]). A 1991 poll conducted by the Roper Organization showed the importance of qualifications. It listed seven arguments for and seven arguments against having women in direct combat. The findings revealed that the top three arguments in favor of having women in combat related to their ability to perform a job, and not to their gender. (Sadler, 1993).

3. Modern technology is changing the battlefield of today and of the future.

This argument goes hand-in-hand with an examination of women's qualifications to fight. Proponents argue that physical strength is not as necessary today because modern combat allows for stand-off weaponry and tactics. Missiles are smarter, aircraft are less vulnerable and more precise, and the United States has no recent history of true hand-to-hand combat. (Stiehm, 1996). Senator Roth and many of his supporters argued in a Senate hearing on the subject that today's aircraft and weapons are great equalizers; women are already involved and have proven their ability to operate such complex machinery (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991).

4. Congress should give authority to the Secretary of Defense to decide on the roles of women in the services.

Chris Jehn, an Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel in the early 1990s, testified to the Senate Armed Services Committee that, "I

think it is essential, though, that the Secretary of Defense be given the flexibility to determine the policies affecting the assignment of women so that we can in fact do the sorts of things I mentioned..." (Department of Defense, 1991, p. 818). Most of the committee members, however, were hesitant to grant such authority until they had a better idea of how exactly the Secretary of Defense intended to implement policies. Senator Exon said, "Just a carte blanche authority to do something without any concept of how that would be carried out is something that I am not sure this subcommittee or the full Armed Services Committee would want to give." (Department of Defense, 1991, p. 818). Senator Roth offered a slightly different view when he said, "Congress should wake up and lift the ban – and let the Pentagon do its job." (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11413).

5. If the goal of the legislation was, in fact, to protect women, then the policy was obsolete.

This push to allow women in combat came about largely in reaction to an opposing view, which stated that the reason for the ban was to protect women from harm. Women were injured, killed, and captured during Operation Desert Storm, where they worked alongside men in places that were not considered "front line;" in the invasion of Panama, a female platoon commander was forced to defend herself, along with her troops, in a firefight. (Stiehm, 1996). Those who said it was not happening or could never work would have been surprised by Dullen's (1981, p. 1) observation of service in Vietnam: "Life over there [Vietnam] was so real and in some ways so much easier. There

was no such thing as black and white, male or female....We worked hard, partied hard, we were a unit."

6. Women are physically strong enough and have no ill effect on unit cohesion.

There was similar reaction to opponent's opinions about strength, combat unit cohesion, and vulnerability to conscription; it was suggested that such arguments are basically irrelevant because they did not apply to the Air Force and Navy's flight squadrons and ships.

7. Equal rights demand that women be given equal opportunities.

The final argument, much different from the others, stems from a basic push for equal rights. Gender equality and justice were still front-running issues of women voters in the early 1990s. Equal rights activists claimed that a lack of opportunities for promotion in combat billets leads to perceptions of women as second-class citizens; in her experience, MGEN Holm relates that women were, in fact, treated as such (Holm, 1991). After women performed well in the Gulf War, activists made a hard push to open up combat specialties to women so that they could be equal and unrestricted in their military career pursuits.

## **2. Con Arguments**

Opponents of women in combat have no shortage of reasons for their beliefs. The major ones are outlined below, and most of them are discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

1. Women should be protected.

One of the major arguments offered by opponents of the legislation states that society believes women should be protected at all costs. Different reasons are offered, the first being that women are givers, not takers, of life. Women have the unique responsibility to give birth and nurture children (in a "motherly" way), and a respect for family dictates that this bond should be held sacred (Schlafly, 1991). Children need their mothers, especially at a young age when they are nursing, and if one parent must go to war, it should be the father (Bruen, 1991). Pregnancy can also interfere with quick mobilization of troops and cause a woman to be sent home from the front lines to protect her pregnancy (Stiehm, 1996). Deployment issues with respect to pregnancy are a big consideration for warfighting units (Matthews, 1992).

A second reason for protecting women is a moral or religious one. RADM Jeremiah Denton, USN (Ret.), calls it "moral and social insanity to subject women to war" (Holm, 1982, p. 342). A 1991 poll conducted by the Roper Organization shows the importance of these beliefs to Americans. One of the top three arguments against allowing women in combat was that, for basic moral reasons, men would feel a greater need to protect women than men (Sadler, 1993). Ronald Ray, in the final report of the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces (1992), defended his beliefs with religious scriptures such as "every male, head by head from twenty years old and upward, whoever is able to go out to war in Israel, you and Aaron shall number them by their armies" (Ryrie, 1995, Numbers 1: 2-3, p. 208).

2. There should be no *requirement* for women to serve in combat.

This argument acknowledges the abilities of women to perform most any job; however, it questions the purpose and necessity of such legislation. James G. Bruen, Jr. (1991, p. 83), who is the editor of *Fidelity*, a monthly magazine of conservative Catholic opinion, states: "Physical ability isn't the only issue involved....It shouldn't even be the primary issue. The question is not whether women can perform satisfactorily in combat. The question is why should they." General Lewis B. Hershey, who was a long-time director of the Selective Service System, offers a similar opinion: "There is no question that women could do a lot of things in the military services. So could men in wheelchairs. But you couldn't expect the services to want a whole company of people in wheelchairs" (Nabors, 1982, p. 19).

3. The push for women in combat comes only from female officers and not from other servicewomen or society.

There is evidence that a large proportion of military women do not desire to serve in combat billets. Opponents argue that the push is coming only from female aviators, whose careers would benefit greatly from the increased command opportunities. (Schlafly, 1991; Owens, 1992). Professor Charles Moskos, a member of the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, "interviewed scores of women who served in the Panama invasion, and he did not find *any* enlisted women who favor repeal of the combat exclusion laws" (Schlafly, 1991, p. 103). Similarly, in testimony before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sergeant Jean Amico, USMC, stated:

I do not wish to go into an offensive combat role. I feel that my talents are much better utilized in the position that I fill now....The position of the enlisted Marine women is that we want to do our job wherever the Marine Corps needs us to do it. But we do not aspire to other jobs more in the combat roles than we are already in" (Department of Defense Authorization, 1991, p. 847).

And Sergeant Susan Leifeste, USA, echoed that sentiment when she said, "I have not talked to too many people who care to become infantry people or take on that job" (Department of Defense Authorization, 1991, p. 847).

It is likely that many of the women in the military at the time of the debates had not joined to serve in the combat arms. Knowing combat billets would not be open to them may have been appealing and they could have chosen the military to serve in support jobs. The fact that some enlisted women expressed concern could still be considered a problem to members of Congress, however, because it is these women who would have to be the initial fillers if combat specialties were made available.

#### 4. Women do not perform as well as men.

Brian Mitchell (1991, p. 80), a former United States Army infantry officer:

There is, in fact, ample evidence that women do not perform many military jobs as well as men....Physical limitations make it impossible for many women to live up to the boast that they perform as well as men....A 1982 Army study found that barely 10 percent of Army women possess the strength to perform 75 percent of Army enlisted jobs.

And Elaine Donnelly, member of the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, talks at great length about the practice of using separate standards of physical fitness and training for men and women. She argues that those were



in place simply because women were physically incapable of performing as well as men (Matthews, 1992).

5. Combat effectiveness will be degraded and national defense will be jeopardized; women will have a negative effect on unit cohesion and morale.

Performance of combat units containing women was one of the most emphasized and argued topics concerning women in combat. Deployment and pregnancy issues, discussed earlier, cause “current policies [to be] contrary to combat readiness [and] common sense” (Schlafly, 1991, p. 101). Conservative, traditional views espoused ideas that women would be an unnecessary distraction to men, one that would reduce combat effectiveness because combat requires a lack of sexual distractions (Schlafly, 1991; Stiehm, 1996). There was fear that more women in the ranks would provide more opportunities for sexual harassment and rape (Congressional Research Service, 1998). Other opponents called the move “unnecessary social experimentation” and argued that national defense should take priority over rights, justice, and equality (Stiehm, 1996; Dunivin, 1997). Interference with the intangible quality of male bonding could damage a unit’s cohesion and readiness, and “the new conservative administration is focusing on complaints about the negative effect of women on the nation’s combat readiness” (Burelli, 1999, p. CRS-7).

6. The past does not prove the future; more research is needed.

Phyllis Schlafly (1991), in her article, “The Combat Exclusion Law is Necessary,” explains her view that the success of women in the Persian Gulf War and in Panama do not prove success in future long-term conflicts, for a number of reasons. The Persian

Gulf War, for example, lasted only six weeks and had an unprecedented low number of casualties – approximately 100 U.S. troops died as opposed to more than 100,000 (estimated) enemy deaths (Schlafly, 1991). The low casualties, she argues, do not prove or guarantee that units containing both men and women can survive successfully in combat. Similarly, a short conflict in Panama did not give needed evidence. Amendment No. 949, proposed by Senators Glenn, McCain, Nunn, and Warner as a way to study the effects of women in combat, requires the Armed Forces to “conduct comprehensive research and analyses...to promptly determine what information it needs for its research....Very little information is available on how well women could perform in a modern fighting force....Before any decision is made, the only rational course is to objectively determine what the effect would be” (Senate Record Vote Analysis, 1991, p. 2).

7. There would be enormous costs involved.

Opponents of the legislation argued that the costs involved (such as refitting ships and barracks or changing living arrangements in combat areas) outweighed any benefit of allowing women to serve in combat billets (Binkin, 1993; Matthews, 1992).

8. Women would have to be subjected to the draft.

If the ban were lifted, there would be no legal right for women to avoid the draft were it ever re-instituted. It is questionable whether America and its young women would be proponents of such an idea (Stiehm, 1996; Ownes, 1992).

9. Women in combat would hurt the military's masculine image.

As Lieutenant Colonel Karen Dunivin, USAF (Ret.) (1997, p.6) explains, "traditionalists tended to view women as anomalies who did not fit conventional images of combat or the masculine warrior. Their reality was a military where women were peripheral figures, especially in war." Diluting such a masculine military image could hurt enlistment and retention, and give men no elite place to turn to where they could exert their masculinity (Gruenwald, 1997).

10. The enemy would consider us more vulnerable.

Although less prevalent in the literature, this argument emerged in the Roper Organization's poll as one of the top three reasons against having women in combat (Sadler, 1993). Foreign societies that do not hold women in the same regard as in the United States might consider a woman's presence in combat units a sign of weakness. The argument follows that such countries might use propaganda to further the idea that America was forced to use women as a last resort to fight a "man's war," reducing credibility and motivating foreign troops.

The pros and cons that were discussed as part of the debate on women in combat exemplify the emotion and the strong feelings of both opponents and proponents of the legislation. To understand the full effects of certain influences on society and members of Congress, however, some specific issues should be studied in greater detail. The first of these is the impact of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

### 3. Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm

The early 1990s, the United States and its allies monitored and fought Iraq in Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm. During the war in January and February of 1991, NATO forces quickly and decisively drove the Iraqis out of Kuwait and inflicted major casualties on Saddam Hussein's army. Included among the United States' forces were over 40,000 women, by far the largest number of women deployed in any major conflict. The breakdown of women by service is shown in Table 1. Women in the Persian Gulf played vital support roles, and of the 135 Americans killed, five were women, and two female soldiers became prisoners of war.

The fact that women were successfully deployed in such great numbers during Operation Desert Storm became a selling point for proponents of women in combat. Although there were some negative reactions, discussed later in this section, the vast majority were positive. As Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney observed: "Women have made a major contribution to the effort. We could not have won without them" (Holm,

**TABLE 1: WOMEN DEPLOYED DURING OPERATION DESERT STORM, BY SERVICE AND ACTIVE-DUTY/RESERVE STATUS**

Service	Active Duty	Reserves	Total
Army	19,500	11,265	30,855
Navy	3,400	1,049	4,449
Marine Corps	1,098	134	1,232
Air Force	2,978	1,268	4,246
<b>Total</b>	<b>27,066</b>	<b>13,716</b>	<b>40,782</b>

Source: Congressional Research Service, 1991.

1991, p. 67). Commanders in the field echoed his sentiments (Holm, 1991). Activists, both in and out of the military, seized such praise and turned to Congress for a repeal of the long-standing ban on women in combat. Their argument was as follows: women are already in combat; they are living, working, and dying on the battlefields, so why should they not be given career opportunities and recognition for their efforts?

Advancement of the cause of women in combat occurred quickly and surely. As Squadron Leader E. G. Jones, RAF (1993, p. 38) says in his essay "Women in Combat – Historical Quirk or the Future Cutting Edge?," "[Women's] performance in the Gulf War brought British and American women soldiers long-awaited respect. A few months of hard work in the desert did more for military women than years of public politicking and painstaking confidence building." Equal Rights activists and women in the military had been pushing for equality in the services for years, and the success of Operation Desert Storm seemed to be the event that would vault them over the hurdle. Becky Constantino, a member of DACOWITS, which asked for a repeal of laws banning women from combat jobs in 1991, said, "Everything just fell together. The timing was perfect, and we believed we would be missing the chance of a lifetime if we delayed it" (Willis, 1991, p. 4). Perhaps, without the Gulf War, Congress would not have lifted the ban.

The article, "Women in Combat," in a 1985 edition of *Newsweek*, explained a possibility for women's roles in future armed conflicts:

Women are now as thoroughly integrated into the armed forces and have advanced so far in key specialties that withdrawing them could seriously hamper the country's combat readiness. In the event of war, the Pentagon could well be faced with the choice of violating at least the spirit of the law – or risk hamstringing military operations. (Conant, 1985, p. 36).

If the spirit of the law was to protect women from being killed, injured, or taken prisoner, then the *Newsweek* prediction came true in the Persian Gulf. The military would have been hamstrung without women, but it could not protect them. And, according to many sources, the American public was comfortable with the possible outcome. An August 1991 nationwide poll, conducted by *Newsweek* magazine, indicated that 79 percent of the public supported women in combat (Mack, 1993). Pete Williams, the chief spokesman for the Department of Defense, said: "One of the lessons we've learned from Operation Desert Storm is the extent to which the nation accepted the significant role of women. Until then there had always been a concern that having women involved in combat would be traumatic for the country" (Mack, 1993, p. 34). And Martin Binkin (1993, p. 166) suggests that the fighting women themselves were "able to adapt as well as men to the austere living conditions and the deprivations common to a military deployment." Such sentiments, polls, and arguments indicate that there was significant support for women to be fully integrated into all aspects of the military.

Opponents of the legislation, however, also used Operation Desert Storm as bedrock for their own arguments, all of which were negative. Schlafly (1991) reports that, in a 1991 Associated Press poll, 66 percent of Americans felt that sending mothers to the Gulf was wrong, especially those who were mothers of very small children. Elaine Donnelly (1994), a member of both DACOWITS and the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, went one step further, saying that women actually involved in the conflict did not think that sending them into the Gulf was a good

idea. She also suggested that the country's political and military leaders did not consider the full effects of sending women to war: "Desert Shield will be declared a success if objectives are reached – regardless of long-term effects on children, families, or society" (Human Events, 1991, p. 94).

Pregnancy and deployment issues during the Persian Gulf War were also big issues raised by those battling the proposed legislation. One Navy ship during Operation Desert Storm saw 36 women, more than 10 percent of its overall complement, become pregnant. And, over 1,200 pregnant women were evacuated from the Gulf, the equivalent of more than two infantry battalions (DiLucente, 1992). Although no immediate negative result was seen, evacuation of fighting troops (women) could conceivably have a profound impact on a long, costly, drawn-out war where every single soldier or sailor was needed. Donnelly (1994) also expresses concern about pregnancy, the ability of units to deploy, and the effect of personnel evacuations on a unit. Her conclusions are based on the fact that, in Desert Storm, the "average pregnancy rate among enlisted women of about 8 to 10 percent, combined with family/child-care problems, meant that the non-deployability rate among military women was three to four times that for men" (Donnelly, 1994, p. 3).

As for the subject of women prisoners of war and women dying in combat, opponents countered the "pro" arguments. They suggested that only a relatively small number of women in Operation Desert Storm were either killed or taken prisoner. According to Norton:

The nation hasn't really decided about women in body bags and women POWs. There weren't enough of either in Desert Storm. What happens to units in combat, in some 21<sup>st</sup> century slugfest, if the nation cries out so loudly at the dying and maiming of mothers, daughters, and sisters that the Commander-in-Chief orders women withdrawn from combat duty? (Norton, 1992).

A final argument raised was the effect women in combat would have on enemy troops. In the Gulf War, Saddam Hussein used the involvement of American and British women to rally his soldiers and try to make them fight harder. He told them they ought to be ashamed, "for not only were they letting the Western infidel fight their battles, the infidel had brought his wife. How could a great nation be defended by weak and feeble women?" (Jones, 1993, p. 38).

#### **4. Tailhook / Equal Opportunity / Military Career Issues**

According to some, the Tailhook convention in the Las Vegas Hilton Hotel during the fall of 1991 evinced a present and overwhelming attitude among male Naval aviators about women in the military. Because women were not seen as equal in either opportunity for combat jobs or in society in general, Tailhook was an example of the prevalent view that women in the military are "second class citizens." Months before the Tailhook event, activists and military women had been arguing that the combat exclusion laws kept women from advancing in both career and status. Tailhook quite possibly proved them to be correct.

The harassment of women at the 1991 Tailhook Convention offered a concrete example of how women in the military were viewed by their male counterparts because of



an inability to perform in and compete for combat jobs. The resulting argument would follow:

Tailhook was not an isolated event; it is, rather, symptomatic of an institutional disrespect for women within the Service, rendering them 'second-class citizens.' This situation will not change until women have the same career opportunities as men. And this, in turn, requires that the combat exclusion be repealed" (Owens, 1992, p. 32).

There was much agreement on this point. Women might never be respected by their male peers until they were given equal responsibilities. Breaking down the barriers to women could unite two hegemonies, that is, male (protector) and female (protected), and create one class of military servicemembers (Zimmerman, 1995).

There was also negative reaction to the argument that Tailhook evinced a greater and more widespread attitude about women. As Elaine Donnelly argues:

She [Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder] rushed to define Tailhook as a "watershed event" – a revelation of the Navy's sexual harassment so shocking that it could be remedied only by lifting the prohibition against women in combat. It was a stunning non-sequitur...but cowed Navy officials felt compelled to embrace it as their own....The brass allowed themselves to be bullied into a capitulation to feminists on procedural and policy issues, at the expense of legal safeguards and sound military policy (Donnelly, 1994, p. 59).

The question may never be decided whether or not events such as those at Tailhook should help dictate policy. The fact cannot be ignored, however, that men acted inappropriately toward their female peers. The need to move forward from the event was best expressed by Admiral Frank B. Kelso, II, Chief of Naval Operations.

At a press conference, Kelso commented: "I greatly regret that I did not have the foresight to see that Tailhook could occur." Then, like a defeated ship of the line laying down a parting shot as it withdrew, Kelso referred to the larger issues Tailhook had brought forth. "Clearly, we needed to change our culture as to how we thought [about] and how we treated females...It takes a long time to change everybody's beliefs and everybody's behavior, but we are moving out to do that." (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 274-275).

The movement for women's rights in society had already been in the public eye, however, long before Tailhook. Women wanted representation in every area of the workforce and society, including the military. But conservatives cautioned against allowing the military to be a "social experiment." Sociologist Richard Gabriel expressed the most extreme idea of what would happen if the "experiment" were to fail: "It will avail us little if the members of our defeated forces are equal. History will treat us for what we were: a social curiosity that failed" (as cited in Owens, 1992, p. 36). Nevertheless, the push for equality was well under way.

Combat exclusions restrict opportunities for women in many ways. Women have fewer opportunities for advancement and promotion, job training, and education, and this has been acknowledged by military leaders (Peach, 1994). A low proportion of women in the military can lead to "tokenism," which also inhibits a woman's ability to advance on her own merits. Senator Glenn recognized the traditional promotion paths when he said: "One of the ways you advance in a military career is either performance in combat or *prospective* performance in combat" (as cited in Peach, 1994, p. 175). This assumption was widely known and accepted, as Beck points out:

Servicewomen say the restrictions hamper their career opportunities. Army officials boast that 285 of the 331 "military occupational specialties" are open to enlisted women. But in fact, only half the jobs in non-combat specialties are available to women, since some are in tank, infantry or other units that are off-limits. Women officers also bitterly complain that the rules have created a "glass ceiling," since advancement to top ranks often depends on leading combat units (Beck, et al., 1991, p. 56; Dusky, 1991).

In the Navy, the combat restrictions caused some problems with Commanding Officer (CO) billets on ships. It appears that tokenism and increased awareness of the advancement of women existed; in 1991 there was a great discrepancy of CO assignments. Because women could serve on and, therefore, command a relatively few number of ships, such ships were "reserved" for women COs, leading to bitterness and division among male officers (Norton, 1992). During 1991, 11 of 24 Combat Logistics Force ships had women executive officers, although women were only one percent of all surface warfare officers. Norton (1992, p. 50) goes on to argue that, if command screening boards "acknowledge the limited choices women have had and screen or select them with the same success rate as men, there will be a double standard nobody wants. If women were given equal assignment opportunity, that wouldn't be necessary."

Most women in the military did not want a double standard. They wanted an equal opportunity to compete for billets and jobs through performance and ability, not tokenism, and to be able to serve their country in any capacity they chose. Lawyer Diana Steele argued to Congress that "men do not have a monopoly on patriotism, physical ability, desire for adventure, or willingness to risk their lives. Until both share in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, women will continue to be considered less than

full-fledged citizens" (as cited in Conant, 1985, p. 38). The issue became, to supporters of the legislation, a matter of equity for women who were willing to give their lives in combat and who had proven their worth in wartime. It was also a matter of equity to men, who asked: why should men be forced into greater danger than women who wear the same uniform? (Bateman, 1994).

### **5. Socialization / Society's Views**

One of the greatest impediments to changing women's roles in the military is the pressure of society. Polls in 1991 showed that society generally approved of allowing women to volunteer for combat positions; however, such views had to battle years of socialization. A considerable amount of research has looked at the differences between men and women and how they are raised differently. Such ingrained social patterns and beliefs would have to change if women were to take on more traditionally-male jobs.

Sex-role socialization is the process "by which humans acquire the behaviors, skills, traits, and standards that their families and social groups value for their sex of assignment," and this process is prevalent in today's American society (Russo, 1991, p. 150). A person's understanding of their roles in society and life begins at an early age. Their identity is defined and reinforced by parents, friends, teachers, television, movies, magazines, and many other sources (Russo, 1991; Brannon, 1991; Barrett, 1995).

Although one cannot deny the biological differences of men and women, gender roles are somewhat more ambiguous. In the past, men were always considered aggressive, risk-taking, heterosexual, strong, and rational. In contrast, women were

viewed as social, motherly, fragile, compliant, and weak (Barrett, 1995). Such sex-role beliefs are “powerful, pervasive, and resistant to change. In this process, girls learn to aspire to stereotypes of the adult female sex roles of wife and mother, and to limit their aspirations and learning experiences accordingly. Boys learn to aspire to stereotypes of the adult male occupational roles, and to widen their aspirations and learning experiences” (Russo, 1991, p. 150-151). Add the emergence of the Equal Rights Amendment in the 1970s, which attempted to redefine the female sex-role, and according to Brannon (1991, p. 299), you get a “loose blueprint for what a woman was supposed to be...there was a Greek chorus of female stereotypes – Betty Crocker and Gracie Allen, Marilyn Monroe and Annabel Lee and Aunt Jemima....”

Russo (1991) also argues that the socialization of children in this way carries a high cost for both girls and boys. Women are devalued and fall under male superiority; men are demeaned if they take on any women-like characteristics. Brannon (1991, p. 297) examines the alternate view when he outlines the Gender Identity Paradigm. He discusses the traditional views of “the development of distinctive male and female behaviors as both *natural* and highly *desirable*, and deviations from this pattern as unhealthy and potentially dangerous.” Because of these differing views and the emergence of “political correctness” in our society, some confusion exists with respect to how children should be taught and raised.

On the one hand, men and women could be socialized more as equals. But since this could cause role confusion and a loss of traditional male values, some argue this

would not be a good thing. Walter McDougall, in his article "The Feminization of the American Military," expresses this idea:

All manner of media are laboring to purge Americans of such benighted attitudes, and all manner of American institutions are breathlessly acquiescing. The title of one of my daughter's favorite bedtime books is Maybe You Should Fly a Jet, and the cover shows a woman – a blonde, glamorous woman – at the controls. Children's television programs inevitably depict female doctors, police, and mechanics...the United States Army encourages women to "be all that you can be" by trading cosmetics and cars for camouflage and helicopters (McDougall, 2000, p. 2).

The downside to this, as Brannon would most likely argue, is also expressed by McDougall:

In an editorial praising deployment of women on warships, the New York Times chided opponents for acting "as if knighthood were still in flower." Well, knighthood gave us the words courtesy and chivalry, taught men how to behave toward enemies, comrades, and women alike, and bade them prefer death to dishonor (McDougall, 2000, p.2).

The traditional male sex-roles are arguably more prevalent in the military than in society. Dunivin (1997) describes the traditional view, or model, of the combat male warrior (CMW). In this model, masculinity was prized above all – the military was a place where men would go to express their manhood, to fight wars, and to protect women. But with a push for women's rights and equal female representation in all aspects of the military, the CMW model found itself under attack. Resistance to change, and a reluctance to alter traditional views of men with respect to a woman's "place in society" caused women to still be seen as tokens or beneficiaries of equal-rights radicals.

This was no more prevalent than in Naval Aviation, which had traditionally been viewed as the ultimate bastion of manhood. When writing about the difficulties facing

LT Paula Coughlin, one of the women allegedly attacked at the Tailhook convention in 1991, Linda Bird Francke (1993, p. 159) offers the view that "of all the military services, the Navy is the most conservative and the least amenable to change...this service has managed to perpetuate an isolated and exclusionary male culture." And the socialization of men into these roles and their subsequent beliefs in them is explained by a former Navy pilot, who observed, "To these junior officers who put their lives on the line flying off aircraft carriers, the concept of a woman flying their jets was an invasion of their masculinity and simply intolerable" (Francke, 1993, p. 216).

For a man's "masculinity" to be attacked is almost unthinkable. Brannon (1991) explains that a man needs a place in which he can be "male," for to define his masculinity is to define him as anything but female. "It is clear," he writes, "that the need to avoid anything considered feminine is a central requirement of the American male sex role, and one which has many aspects and consequences" (Brannon, 1991, p. 307). Similarly, he tells a story of when he observed a boy's being chastised by his peers for carrying his books "like a girl," and he vowed to never, in his entire life, be caught carrying his books in that manner. As women have infiltrated more and more traditionally-male areas of society and the military, there can be no male identity of "that which is not female." A female fighter pilot, in one fell swoop, has in theory eradicated one entire subculture in which a male could find his individuality and character.

It is interesting to note the social climate in the early 1990s as the debate raged on regarding women in combat. It appears that the legislation to lift combat exclusion laws was generally supported both in society and in the military. But it was supported

primarily if the service of women in combat billets were voluntary, not mandatory. Although people agreed a woman should be given the chance to hold a combat job if she wanted, it seems clear that the majority of women would not wish to put themselves in harm's way. An average parent, for example, supported the legislation as long as it did not *force* his or her daughter to serve in combat arms.

This is an important distinction, for, if it is true that women generally did not want to be in combat, the debates centered only on about one percent of the women officers in the military who desired equal opportunity for advancement and command (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991). McDougall (2000, p. 1) offers this idea: "Since most women in the military would not volunteer for combat even if they could, a few 'exceptions' – who do want to storm beaches with an M-60 machine gun or bomb Baghdad from a B-2 – are what this fevered debate is really about. In essence, we are asked to transform an entire culture of the U.S. military...on behalf of a small number of women who demand the 'right' to fight alongside men."

Many polls were conducted to measure society's opinion, and there was an initial assumption that society did not support removing the ban and that most people did not want to see women come home in body bags or be captured as POWs (Roush, 1991). In 1980, only 22 percent of the general population felt that women should be allowed to serve in combat jobs (Eitelberg, 1990). That number increased significantly and quickly; polls after 1982 seem to indicate general support for the voluntary service of women in combat, although the percentages differ greatly, as seen below:



1. **1982:** The National Opinion Research Center found that 84 percent of those surveyed were in favor of increasing or maintaining the proportion of women in the services, and 62 percent felt women should be allowed to be fighter pilots (Schroeder, 1991; Bateman, 1991).
2. **1986:** NBC News showed that 80 percent of people agreed with the policy of not evacuating women during armed conflict (Eitelberg, 1990).
3. **1990:** CBS and the New York Times found that 72 percent favored a woman's right to serve in combat if she wanted to (Holm, 1991; Schroeder, 1991).
4. **1992:** The Air Force Military Personnel Center conducted a survey of Air Force members. Fifty-six percent said women should be in air combat. Eight of ten female pilots would have wanted to fly in combat, but only four of ten male pilots said they would be willing to accept a combat mission with women (West, 1992).
5. **1992:** The Roper Organization conducted a poll to be used as part of the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces. Of the general public, 47 percent were for women in direct combat. In the Navy, that number was 53 percent; however, in the Marine Corps the number against women in combat was 78 percent (Sadler, 1993).

Although the numbers after 1982 ranged from 47 percent to 84 percent, some general trends are apparent. The "bottom line" appears to be combat capability, and the public felt that women would not adversely affect readiness and national security. Greater support was expressed for women in combat aircraft and on surface ships, but the

public was generally opposed to women in ground combat. The 1992 Roper Poll also showed a concern that both men and women with small children not be sent to war.

## **6. Parenting / Gender Issues**

Society's views on the roles of men and women and its perception of how these roles should be played out in the military, as discussed in the previous section, touch on the idea that men and women are different in many ways. The socialization of women and men, as well as alleged differences in emotional, physical, psychological, and mental capacities as they relate to fighting, fueled the debate on women in combat. Those who believed women were unsuited for the rigors of combat relied on physical statistics and a perceived lack of aggressiveness in women to support their arguments; proponents of the legislation countered with the changing nature of warfare and the success of women in Operation Desert Storm.

Many opponents of women in combat attacked the physical capabilities of women. John Luddy (1994), for example, argued that Congress should first answer some serious questions before allowing women into combat. And the first of these questions was: "Are women physically suited to the rigors of combat?" Luddy cited a 1992 study by the Department of Military Science at the University of Michigan, which found that:

1. The top 20 percent of women at West Point achieved scores on the Army Physical Fitness Test equivalent to the bottom 20 percent of male cadets.
2. Only seven percent of women can meet a score of 60 on the push-up test, while 78 percent of men exceed it.
3. A 20- to 30-year-old woman has the same aerobic capacity as a 50-year-old man.
4. Only one woman out of 100 could meet a physical standard achieved by 60 out of 100 men.

(Luddy, 1994, p. 3).

Many arguments, such as the one above, center around physical fitness tests and the question of whether or not women should be able to accomplish the same run times, the same number of push-ups or pull-ups, and the same number of sit-ups as men. If one is theorizing that it is only important for a military member to achieve a certain level of fitness for their gender (for example, the idea that the military needs members to be in the top 70 percent relative to their male or female peers), then the direct comparison between men and women on such tests is irrelevant.

If there is a proven or perceived necessity, however, for a single level of physical performance that is required by both men and women to execute a certain job, the numbers are of extreme importance. Two such arguments center on the strength needed to perform specific jobs. First, Burelli (1999, p. CRS-6) states, "The average female recruit has from 50%-70% of the strength, stamina, and muscle mass of the average male recruit with the greatest disparity existing in the female's upper body strength. Since the major physical capacity requirements for many military jobs are deemed to be lifting and carrying, upper body strength is a limiting factor for women in these jobs." And second, a 1982 Army study found that "barely 10 percent of Army women possess the strength to

perform 75 percent of Army enlisted jobs" (Mitchell, 1991, p. 80). Convincing claims of pure physical strength differences are a main reason women are not allowed to serve in ground combat billets. For a woman to perform other types of jobs, such as a pilot or surface warfare officer, the argument does not necessarily hold because upper-body strength has not been proven to be a requirement.

Richard Hooker (1991) observes that individual women may be stronger than the average man, but these women are a very small proportion of the total. Reduced physical capability is therefore predictable. He argues, however, that women lack the aggressiveness and psychological resistance of men, and such differences can occasionally be muted to enhance a woman's performance, but only to a point. He cautions that it cannot be assumed that perceived or real psychological, cultural, and social-distinction differences can be considered meaningless on the battlefield.

Similarly, there were many other suggested differences between men and women that come from theories of gender ideology and psychology, and they have also been used to counter the push for women in combat. Gender ideologies center around myths about women and men, the nature of war and combat, and stereotypes of socialization. According to such arguments, women focus on caring, nurturing, responsibility, and rationality, while men focus on justice, rights, and autonomy (Peach, 1994). War brings out the worst in men, and the view holds that the killing associated with combat is often unthinkable for a woman's "nature." As Marine Corps Commandant General Robert Barrows once observed, "Combat is uncivilized and women cannot do it. Nor should they even be thought of as doing it....I think the very nature of women disqualifies them

from doing it. Women give life, sustain life, nurture life; they do not take it" (Utilization of Women, 1991, p. 895). Air Force Chief of Staff General Merrill McPeak testified before the Senate Armed Services Committee and similarly remarked, "Combat is about killing people....All I got to fall back on is my own private reluctance to push women in that direction. It is an old fashioned attitude, but that is my attitude" (Department of Defense Authorization, 1991, p. 831, 834). This view was also expressed by a United States Marine Corps pilot: "War is a terrible thing. Almost unimaginable the horrors we would have to face. If somebody has to do it, let me do it; you [speaking to a woman] don't need to do that" (J. A. Pritchard, personal communication 12 June 1995). Such an attitude was very common and stemmed from the socialization of males to be protectors of women and the stronger sex, both physically and mentally. Socialization also added to the idea that men are brought up to treat women in a certain way, and as Beck (1991, p. 56) states: "Men simply cannot treat women like other men. And it's silly to think a few months' training can make them into sexless soldiers."

Gender differences related to sexuality and pregnancy also fueled the debate. Some opponents of lifting the ban felt that women who were more involved in the workplace, especially in the close confines of ships or infantry units, would cause sexual tension, non-professional relationships, and a greater chance for sexual harassment, or worse (Mitchell, 1991). Elaine Donnelly assumed the following progression: Having more women leads to more fraternization; more fraternization leads to more marriages, more spouse assignment problems, pregnancy problems, and child care problems; and the end result is that the military changes from a bachelor force to a family force (Human

Events, 1991). And, with respect to legitimate relationships between men and women, especially husbands and wives, the issue of pregnancy cannot be ignored. Stiehm (1996) cites that, at any given time, a full 10 percent of servicewomen are pregnant. These women are not eligible for deployment during most of their pregnancy as well as their maternity leave after childbirth; it is conceivable that time away from their job can be detrimental to the unit and to the training of the women themselves.

After his country's experience of putting women in combat, the Israeli Prime Minister thought that placing women in combat had violated the "concept of motherhood and the status of women as mothers." (Owens, 1992, p. 35). The United States' involvement in Operation Desert Storm provided some close-to-home data points. Military rules specify that single parents and two-career service couples must designate short- and long-term guardians; when mothers went to war in Iraq, the American public expressed a desire to bring them home (Beck, 1991). Another integral concern was the effects on children if both parents were assigned to and killed in a war, and in Iraq, husband and wife had to both serve on many occasions (Brien, 1991). Socially, an outcry also focused on the one unique and ultimate power of women: motherhood. Should they lose that, opponents asked, what would happen to our society? (DiLucente, 1992). Opponents of women in combat argued that the decision should not be made by Congress until the Gulf War was studied in greater depth, with a focus on the effects on mothers and children (Schlafly, 1991).

Despite the opposition outlined thus far in this chapter, not all was grim for proponents of women in combat. Many men feared that change was a mistake because it

would attack their traditionally-male military society. Kate Muir sarcastically attacked this fear when she explained that men who identified only with traditional and outdated ideas would feel their egos and identities stripped to nothing: "She is wearing his trousers. They are khaki. Worse still, she is driving his tank. In the dust, crushed under its tracks, lies what remains of his machismo. The woman soldier has invaded the last place where the warrior could celebrate his masculinity in safety, and debugged him." (Jones, 1993, p. 39).

Some proponents of women in combat, including Senator John Glenn, a co-sponsor of Amendment No. 949, argued that it would be acceptable and sensible to institute the same physical requirements for both men and women if it could be proven that physical strength was needed for certain jobs (Senate Record Vote Analysis, 1991; DiLucente, 1992). The idea of the changing nature of warfare was used to counter a universal physical standard. Senators William Roth, Jr. and Edward Kennedy both argued to Congress that today's aircraft is an equalizer because of its technology and modern warfare increasingly requires skill instead of traditional strength (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991). Eitelberg (1990) creates the phrase "delta factor" to describe the physical strength and ability differences between men and women. Statistical data are hard to dispute when they show that the average man is taller than the average woman, has greater muscle mass, longer legs, and overall strength (Binkin & Bach, 1977). However, Eitelberg writes:

The delta factor cannot be easily rejected as a reason for denying women access to combat jobs....There are no separate standards for men and women on the battlefield. The delta factor would thus tip the hand for men if women were forced to fight against men on a one-for-one basis. But, again, some women could perform at least as well as their average male counterpart. And, in most combat situations, people perform in groups – raising the issue of an individual's performance as a member of a larger unit. It should also be noted that the average woman in the United States is physically larger than the average man in some other nations (Eitelberg, 1990, p. 16, 18).

With respect to physiological issues, there is as much support for the abilities of women as there is opposition, as evidenced by VADM William Lawrence, USN (Ret.), when he says "Women are tough as Hell" (Seigle, 1992). This comes from his experiences both with women in the Navy and with his own daughter, who in the early-1990s was selected as a United States Astronaut. Ron Maughan, physiologist at Aberdeen University, also observed: "There are no jobs – apart from a sperm bank donor – that I can think of which women are incapable of doing because of their physiology" (Jones, 1993, p. 38). In Operation Desert Storm, servicewomen showed no more signs than did men of being unable to cope with stress, including threats of biological warfare and concerns for their own safety (Mack, 1993; Binkin, 1993). And in his article "Equality, A Step Backward," LT A DiLucente, USNR (1992, p. 46), recognizes:

For centuries, women have shown they can sustain themselves under battle stress, and their presence today in terrorist and guerilla units throughout the world is evidence of their ability to be ruthless. The autonomic nervous systems of men and women react the same way, according to Dr. Scott Pengelly, a Vietnam veteran. "Whoever is raising the point that you have to have testosterone to be aggressive is trying conveniently to forget the mid-brain," he says, referring to the adrenaline-activating hypothalamus. "The mid-brain never rests, male or female – it doesn't care. It's going to function the way it's supposed to."



Social acceptance of women in combat and the possibility of female casualties, according to proponents of the legislation, is not a problem in today's society, and the younger generations of Americans can accept the prospect. Grief for a woman who has been killed in action or taken as a prisoner of war would be the same as for men, and there is no reason to believe it would be greater (DiLucente, 1992). The initial assumption that women would be less available than men because of pregnancy and childbirth was arguably proven false in a 1984 study. Instead, it was found that men were unavailable more often than women, but mainly for being absent-without-leave and for other reasons (Roush, 1991).

Although the debate was never fully resolved, gender differences and pregnancy issues were at the forefront of discussions about the role of women in the military. Women were thought to be unsuited for combat for a number of reasons: lack of strength, different emotional and coping skills, different psychological make-up, and the fact that they bear children. Women have historically proven themselves capable and competent in their military jobs, however, and proponents argued that there was no reason to believe they would not do the same in combat billets. The data and numbers are limited, and even Operation Desert Storm cannot be used as a one-to-one comparison since women were technically out of "harm's way." Another disagreement needed to be settled as well, mainly the effect women would have on morale, esprit de corps, and military readiness.

## 7. Readiness Issues

Whether or not opponents of the legislation felt they had won the battle with respect to gender differences, they made another big push to convince Congress and the American public that women would diminish the abilities of fighting units. This was arguably a more successful stance because of inadequate information about the actual effects of women on combat units. Without such factual information, proponents of women in combat would have trouble countering the arguments.

The readiness debate raged in both the media and in Congress, fueled by statements of both opinion and fact. General Robert Barrow, former Commandant of the Marine Corps, espoused the traditional view: "If you want to destroy the combat effectiveness of a unit, put women in it" (Downing, 1992, p. 45). There was a general assumption that women would "denigrate our ability to wage war," and combat exclusion rested on a number of similar beliefs (Roush, 1991, p. 59). The effect of women on male bonding in units was uncertain, but essential to understand. In Congress, Senator Roth recognized the importance when he said, "Make no mistake, military excellence must be our first priority" (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11413); however, traditionalists jumped to the conclusion that the effect of women in units could be nothing but negative.

Col. Mackubin Owens, USMCR, explains another common sentiment among opponents in his article "Women in Combat – Equal Opportunity or Military Effectiveness?" He quotes the former Israeli Defense Minister, Moshe Dayan, who said that in Israel's war of independence, "women reduced the combat effectiveness of

Haganah units because men moved to protect them out of fear of what the Arabs would do to our women if they captured them" (Owens, 1992, p. 35). Taken one step further, COL Owens (1992, p. 34) argues: "[American] men may try to protect women at the expense of the overall mission or engage in sexual competition, both of which undermine the bond."

General Barrow argued that developing combat leaders today has "taken a back seat to ensuring the success of women" (Downing, 1992, p. 45). The question of whether the military was more interested in furthering social equality and equal opportunity than military readiness was hotly debated. Because of the limited number of women that would be initially affected by the legislation, many shared the views expressed by Binkin (1993, p. 166):

The issue of whether to allow women to engage in combat pits two powerful forces in American society – national security and equal opportunity – against one another. The choice is difficult because it requires an assessment of the tradeoff between the uncertain risk to national security of making fundamental changes in the culture of combat units, on one hand, and, on the other, furthering a social imperative that, in the end, would probably benefit only a limited number of women.

If such cultural and manpower changes did, in fact, take place in the military, proponents claimed it would be good. Women would make a necessary and positive impact on the military forces, because, according to LCDR Bolebruch (1992), the availability of men has steadily decreased over the past 10 years and was expected to bottom out in the mid-1990s. There is some irony in the fact that women were largely responsible for keeping the all-volunteer system alive in the 1970s (Eitelberg, 1990); because of several demographic factors, the same has remained true in the 1990s.

If the combat exclusions were lifted, opponents wondered what the draft status of women would be, since equal rights demand equal responsibilities. A direct fallout of drafting women would raise the same issues of military readiness – if women were drafted, could they perform jobs beside men and have a positive or neutral influence on esprit de corps and readiness? Most people would have probably agreed with the following idea:

Even if the ground-combat positions were opened to women, the military assumes that few women would meet the physical qualifications and the court would likely uphold a decision by Congress to register or draft only men. In *Rotsker [v. Goldberg]*, the court considered the fact that 80,000 individuals in a draft of 650,000 would be used to fill noncombat positions and that a small number of women could be drafted for noncombat roles. (Bolebruch, 1992, p. 42).

The drafting of women (or men) into combat positions, especially ground combat positions, is not likely to occur in the near future. Indeed, the effect this could have on society's views and on the effectiveness of infantry or other ground combat units may never be known.

The main problem with this issue, however, is that not much *is* known about the effects of women on esprit de corps and fighting units. If the prior successes of women in their traditional non-combat billets, at the Service Academies, and in Operation Desert Storm have any relevance, "it's difficult to respond to the notion that women can't, don't, or won't bond, and that their presence precludes males from bonding with each other" (Roush, 1991, p. 61). Nevertheless, when men who have actually served in combat think it could be a major problem, then the issue should clearly not be ignored (Downing, 1992; Webb, 1979).

#### **D. SUMMARY**

The issues presented in this chapter are important background for answering the research questions of this thesis. Information on the background of women in combat and women in the U.S. Armed Forces places the Congressional decision in historical context. Major issues and public opinion could have exercised a considerable impact on decision makers; it remained to be seen if political and social influences played a role in Congress in 1991. Background information and research questions led to the literature review and interview process explained in the following chapter.

### III. METHODOLOGY

An extensive literature review consisted of the examination of over 75 sources, including books, magazine articles, Internet articles, encyclopedias, items in the Congressional record, Congressional Research Service articles, and the 1992 Presidential Commission's report to the President. The reviewed media covered the background, legal and legislative histories, general legislative matters, opinions and facts as they relate to women in combat, Congressional testimony and voting records, and public opinion polls. This analysis revealed observable patterns and trends both in fact and personal opinion. The facts presented in this thesis were verified by multiple sources, and the personal opinions were evaluated for consistency, repetition, and credibility.

Understanding the Congressional legislative process was an important part of the literature review so that the women-in-combat legislation could be studied in context. This was accomplished in two ways. First, some of the written sources that were examined contained Congressional records and general descriptions of legislative matters. Second, three of the interviewees, two Congressional aides and one member of the House of Representatives, helped explain processes.

Nine interviews were conducted to search for similarities and differences between recollections and researched facts. Key individuals from four major areas were interviewed to gain a thorough cross-sectional view of legislative and military matters. The four major areas and related interviews are as follows:

1. Introduction of the legislation into the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) and the House of Representatives.

- Patricia Schroeder, former Congresswoman (D-CO) and sponsor of women-in-combat legislation in the House Armed Services Committee
- Karen Heath, former senior staff member, Military Personnel and Compensation Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee and aide to Congresswoman Beverly Byron (D-MD)

2. Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) debates and passing the bill in the Senate.

- Major General Arnold Punaro, USMCR, former SASC majority staff director and aide to Senator Sam Nunn (D-GA)

3. Views of the offices of both the Secretary of Defense and the Chief of Naval Operations.

- Chris Jehn, former Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel
- Admiral Frank B. Kelso, III, USN (Ret.), former Chief of Naval Operations

4. The push for women in combat by equal rights activists, both inside and outside of the military.

- Colonel Barbara Lee, USA, activist for the advancement of women in the military

- Captain Rosemary Mariner, USN (Ret.), one of the first female Naval aviators
- Captain Georgia Sadler, USN (Ret.), frequent writer on the subject of women in the Navy
- Carolyn Becraft, former director of the Women's Equity Action Group (Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Manpower and Reserve Affairs at the time of the interview)

Researching the topic by cross-sectional interviewing was expected to yield one of two results. The first is that the views expressed about how and why the women-in-combat issue was resolved could be inconsistent. If this proved to be the case, an attempt would be made to interview more than one person per area of interest and responsibility. The second possible outcome of the interviews is that the opinions and ideas expressed would be generally consistent. This would alleviate the need for more extensive interviewing and lend credibility to conclusions and implications that were based heavily on the interviews. In this instance, if different people with varied personal interests and opinions discussed the same points and ideas, the probability is high that the information is accurate.

The interviews were semi-structured and used open-ended questions to allow the interviewees some latitude in providing their answers. The expertise and experience of each person interviewed determined the initial line of questioning and the ensuing discussion; however, themes and general topics of the interviews are covered in the following list:



1. In 1991, what position did you hold and how were you involved in the decision to rescind combat exclusion laws?
2. How did the decision affect you personally?
3. What do you remember of the general climate in Congress, society, and/or the military?
4. In your opinion, what were the biggest issues that caused a drive to allow women into combat billets? What were the biggest issues involved in the debates, both in and out of Congress?
5. Were Party politics a factor?
6. What implications would this decision have for individuals (Secretary of Defense, Chief of Naval Operations, women in the military, members of Congress, etc.)?
7. Why do you think the legislation passed relatively easily in both houses of Congress?
8. What effect, if any, did the fact that an election year was approaching have on members of Congress and political appointees?
9. What effect, if any, did the following have on the decision and its implementation: Operation Desert Storm, budget considerations, physical differences between men and women, the Tailhook scandal, and the different missions of the military services?

With the subjects' permission, all interviews were recorded on cassette tape, transcribed for reference and for direct quotes, and analyzed for content relating to the

research questions. Similarities and differences were noted, and conclusions were drawn. Because of the base of knowledge that was established by the literature review, patterns emerged from the interviews that shed light on how and why Congress voted to open most combat specialties to women and why the President and Secretary of Defense chose to implement such a policy change. Unresolved questions and issues not covered were established as areas for further research.

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## IV. CONGRESSIONAL PROCEEDINGS

### A. SUMMARY

Because women were legally restricted from serving in combat (Title 10 of the U.S. Code), the first step toward allowing women to serve in combat billets in the Navy and Air Force was for Congress to repeal or change the existing law. The Army had no similar law restricting it from putting women into combat billets; it was Army policy that kept the constraints in place. However, it was clear that the Army's leaders were comfortable with the combat exclusion policy, and would not make a change unless ordered to do so (Department of Defense, 1991).

The administration of President Carter made "the only serious attempt" prior to 1991 to repeal the combat exclusion laws, but the proposal was quickly defeated by its opponents (Holm, 1991, p. 70). The issue resurfaced after the invasion of Panama (1986) and was also defeated. Not until after Operation Desert Storm (1991) did a push to open certain combat billets to women begin to take root.

During the House Armed Services Committee's annual mark-up for Defense Authorization in May 1991, Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder introduced legislation to repeal combat restrictions for female Air Force pilots. The Chair of the Military Personnel and Compensation Subcommittee, Congresswoman Beverly Byron, co-sponsored the proposal and added female Navy pilots. The legislation passed in both the House Armed Services Committee and the full House of Representatives and was then sent to the Senate Armed Services Committee for consideration. The proposal found

much greater opposition among Senators; the SASC held long and emotional hearings on the issue, with testimony by the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel, the four Service Chiefs, active duty military members, women's rights activists, and conservative lobby groups. The SASC recommended a temporary ban on the legislation to study the effects and abilities of women in combat aircraft.

Two amendments were proposed on the Senate floor starting on 31 July 1991. The first, Amendment No. 948, was introduced by Senators Roth and Kennedy and asked for full repeal of the combat aviation exclusion laws. Amendment No. 949, introduced by Senators Glenn, McCain, Nunn, and Warner, proposed a temporary repeal until a Presidential Commission could study the issue more thoroughly. Both amendments were passed. The legislation then went to conference committee, where the House and Senate were required to resolve all differences. Because the House had voted for full repeal, the compromise that was reached called for a repeal but also for establishing the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, which was to study the issues and report to the President and Congress no later than December of 1992.

Controversy surrounded the assignment of commissioners because many appointees were outspoken critics of expanding the roles for military women. Nevertheless, the Commission was formed; it completed a study and forwarded a final report to President Bush and to Congress. President Bush did not act on the Commission's recommendations before leaving office in January 1993. On 28 April 1993, President Clinton and Secretary of Defense Aspin ordered the assignment of

women into combat aircraft, and on 30 November 1993, Congress rescinded the laws barring women from assignment aboard combat vessels.

## **B. DEBATES**

In debating the women-in-combat question, the legislators of this country immersed themselves in an admittedly controversial and important issue. According to Senator Warner: "We are dealing with one of the most important moments in the history of the Armed Forces of the United States" (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11423). The proposal moved fairly smoothly through the House Armed Services Committee and the full House of Representatives (National Defense Authorization, 20-22 May 1991; K. Heath, interview, 17 February 2000; P. Schroeder, interview, 1 March 2000). The Senate debates, however, both on the floor and in the Armed Services Committee, were much more extensive – filling over 125 pages of text in the Congressional and SASC Record. Although an in-depth review is beyond the scope of this research, insights can be gained that shed light on how this decision (and others equally as complicated) have been and will be dealt with in Congress. The record reveals how background issues, outlined in Chapter II, affected the decision, and whether or not Party politics appeared to be a factor.

### **1. House Armed Services Committee and House of Representatives**

Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder introduced legislation to repeal combat restrictions for female Air Force pilots during the House Armed Services Committee's annual mark-up for Defense Authorization in May 1991. This was done with almost no

forewarning to the members of the HASC. Karen Heath, aide to Congresswoman Byron, said that Congresswoman Schroeder's office did not call until the morning of the mark-up to inform her that the proposal would be offered (K. Heath, interview, 17 February 2000). It was then that Congresswoman Byron decided to co-sponsor the initiative and add female Navy pilots to the proposal.

Amendments such as the one proposed by Congresswomen Schroeder and Byron were not typically offered in this manner. As Karen Heath said:

Normally you would have extensive hearings and so-forth. There had been a subcommittee record over the years on hearings to look at specific issues like Panama and Desert Storm. But we had not had hearings on combat exclusion...very unusual procedure. And it passed – one of the more extraordinary days I remember in 13 ½ years on the Armed Services Committee (K. Heath, interview, 17 February 2000).

Congresswoman Schroeder (interview, 1 March 2000) explained her motivation and procedure when she said: "It's no secret that we had been trying to move this and other issues, and had been all along. It was a little sticky because I wasn't on the Personnel Committee...so I decided to do it in full committee – bring it out when the press was there and let them vote it up or down."

Although the record of the HASC procedure on 8 May 1991 could not be found for this research, references with information about the proceedings were consistent enough to conclude that there was no great amount of debate and the legislation passed fairly quickly<sup>1</sup>. In addition to the quotes previously mentioned, Congresswoman

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<sup>1</sup> The author was unable to locate public record of the House Armed Services Committee meeting in which this legislation was discussed. It is assumed to have been a closed hearing.

Schroeder referenced the HASC procedure when she spoke to the House of Representatives on 9 May 1991 and said:

Mr. Speaker, I come here to congratulate my colleagues on the Committee on Armed Services. I must say yesterday, when I introduced an amendment to lower the combat restrictions on women in the Air Force, and it was amended by the gentlewoman from Maryland [Mrs. Byron] to be even more expansive, so we lowered the combat restrictions on aircraft in the Navy and the Marines, I never dreamed we would get it out of the House Committee on Armed Services. But they indeed voted for it, and indeed this is an historic moment....

Mr. Speaker, I think the time has come to really salute [female pilots] and give them a full chance to shine, and that is what the Committee on Armed Services did yesterday (United States Congress, 1991, p. H2907).

After the legislation made it through the HASC, it was offered up in the House as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993. It was imbedded in the entire Authorization Act under Title V (Military Personnel Policy), Part A (General Matters), Section 512 (Repeal of Statutory Limitations on Assignment of Female Members to Combat Aircraft). An amendment, called the Michel Amendment, was offered by Congressman Michel (D-IL) and Congressman Dickinson (D-AL) and would have kept statutory laws in place. The only discussion about women in combat found in the entire National Defense Authorization Act debates in the House was during arguments over the Michael Amendment. Congresswoman Schroeder testified as follows:



The Committee on Armed Services surprised itself by voting overwhelmingly for the Byron Amendment and for my amendment to eliminate the statutory restriction on women in combat aircraft in the Navy and the Air Force. Following the superb performance of female soldiers in the Persian Gulf, the committee decided it was time to permit women to pursue every job for which the woman had the physical and intellectual qualifications in the military. Sex discrimination can no longer be justified in the military.

A vote for the Dickinson substitute [Michel Amendment] would restore the statutory exclusion for women in combat aircraft. A vote for Dickinson is a vote to maintain sex discrimination in the military. (National Defense Authorization, 20-22 May 1991, p. 3297).

The House voted 287-127 to reject the Michel Amendment; when they later voted 268-161 to accept the proposed National Defense Authorization Act, Section 512 was accepted as well (National Defense Authorization, 20-22 May 1991). No clear Party distinction can be found in the vote, although it has been speculated that the split was more generational: older, World War II-era members voted against the legislation and younger members generally voted for the change (C. Becraft, interview, 3 February 2000; P. Schroeder, interview, 1 March 2000).

## **2. Senate Armed Services Committee/Senate Floor/Conference Committee**

In the Senate, repealing the laws banning women from combat aircraft was not nearly as simple. The Armed Services Committee held an extensive hearing on 18 June 1991, during which the members heard testimony from the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel, the four Service Chiefs, active duty military members, women's rights activists, and conservative lobby groups. The hearing was

quite emotional and was described by one of the testifying members as “a complete circus” (C. Jehn, interview, 17 November 1999).

The Assistant Secretary of Defense, Chris Jehn, indicated that the Secretary of Defense was against rescinding combat exclusion laws, and the four Service Chiefs all testified that they, too, recommended not making the change. Jehn did say, however, that the Secretary welcomed authority and flexibility to make policy. Similarly, the Service Chiefs all assured the Committee that, if they were so tasked, they would successfully carry out the mission of integrating women into combat aviation squadrons.

The SASC also heard testimony from eight active-duty military members: an officer and enlisted member from each of the four services. Two of the persons interviewed for this thesis felt that the Committee selected the military members to put a negative “spin” on the issue. “The Senate had some hearings,” noted Karen Heath, “and I think in the view of advocates, they were not exactly balanced hearings. They brought in some witnesses who had very clear views” (K. Heath, interview, 17 February 2000). And, as Carolyn Becraft observed: “My perspective is that there were some who very much wanted to kill it. They were getting extreme pressure from the right wing, military retirees, and from the Pentagon – who were not supportive” (C. Becraft, interview, 3 February 2000).

The SASC interviewed two male officers (Army and Marine Corps), two female officers (Navy and Air Force), two male enlisted persons (Navy and Air Force) and two female enlisted persons (Army and Marine Corps). All the Army and Marine Corps members, male and female, said they felt that combat was not the place for women, while

all Navy and Air Force members testified that women should be allowed the chance to fly in combat (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991). Since the Army and Marine Corps are involved primarily with ground combat missions, the differences of opinion are not surprising. The question up for debate, however, was not about women in ground combat units, so the positions presented by the Army and Marine Corps members were essentially irrelevant.

Becky Constantino, Chair of DACOWITS, and Shirley Sagawa, director of the National Women's Law Center, also testified during the SASC debate, and both argued that no limitations should be placed on women in the military. Becky Constantino referenced the success of women in Operation Desert Storm and then added:

The time has come to give the chain of command the flexibility to use their best people to accomplish the tasks which our country asks of them. Perhaps the time is about right for another step forward for Americans, for another leap of faith, which will continue to make our military the most efficient and effective, respected and admired in the world, unencumbered by combat exclusion laws (Department of Defense, 1991, p. 861).

Shirley Sagawa echoed her sentiments.

Final testimony came from Elaine Donnelly, former member of DACOWITS and executive director of the Center for Military Readiness, and GEN Robert Barrow, USMC (Ret.), former Commandant of the Marine Corps. Donnelly testified that Congress should maintain control of the issue of women in combat; GEN Barrow used his combat experiences to argue that women should not be in combat.

After the "circus" was complete, the Senate Armed Services Committee presented a recommendation to the Senate. The recommendation was for a temporary repeal of

aviation combat exclusion laws and for the establishment of a commission to study the issues related to women in combat. When the legislation was introduced into the Senate, however, two separate amendments were offered. Amendment No. 949 (Glenn/McCain/Nunn/Warner) reflected the Committee's position for temporary repeal and a commission study. But a separate amendment for a full repeal, Amendment No. 948 (Roth/Kennedy), was also proposed, not as a substitute for No. 949 but as a separate amendment, even though it had not been specifically discussed in Committee. GEN Punaro explains:

As I recall, Kennedy deferred offering the amendment [in Committee]; said he would offer it on the Senate floor. The Roth/Kennedy amendment says to lift the restrictions. The Glenn/McCain amendment, which was offered in the nature of a substitute, said do the study but lift the restrictions only while the study is on going. So if Kennedy and Roth offered their amendment first, we could then get the floor, send in our substitute, which would be a second-degree amendment to their amendment, and get the first vote. The McCain/Warner actually passed. What happened was, there was unanimous consent. Unanimous consent is a procedural situation to limit debate after the sequencing of the amendments. Kennedy and Roth were vehemently opposed to McCain and Glenn's offering a second-degree in the nature of a substitute. They wanted an up or down vote on their amendment (A. Punaro, interview, 29 December 1999).

Before the vote, many issues were covered in the Senate debate. Most of the discussion was by the six Senators involved in offering the two amendments; each group tried to convince their colleagues that, not only was it the right time to allow women to fly combat aircraft, but also that their particular bill was better than the other. No direct opposition was presented against either bill, except for arguing the differences between the two. But "pro" opinions abounded, especially as they related to timing and equal

opportunity. Senator Warner, for example, argued for "America moving out and establishing not only for ourselves but for the rest of the world a course of action with regard to the participation of women in the military forces" (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11413). Other members also espoused similar thoughts. According to Senator Roth: "It is about the best pilots flying combat missions....This amendment is not only the right action but the right action at the right time." Senator Kennedy added: "These [current] laws are bad for women, because they deny them an equal opportunity for service and advancement in the military" (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11413, 11415, 11416).

Senators Roth and Kennedy spent time trying to convince Congress that, in this instance, its role as a governing body with respect to the military was not to micromanage the law, but to delegate as much authority and responsibility as possible to the senior military leaders. As Senator Roth observed:

Congress should wake up and lift the ban – and let the Pentagon do its job....Our legislation gives the Secretary of Defense maximum flexibility to fill the job with the best-qualified person....We simply remove the congressionally imposed restriction which prevents women from flying combat aircraft – and give the Defense Department the authority to determine how best to use women aviators (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11413).

Senator Kennedy offered the following explanation: "Our amendment...only gives the Secretaries of the Air Force and the Navy the same authority that the Secretary of the Army has had since 1948 to assign women to all combat positions....Congress retains full control over the terms of any future draft law" (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11415, 11416).

Arguments for releasing Congress from its authority over this issue were attacked, however, by the authors of Amendment No. 949. Senator McCain said that, if Congress wanted to give the military more authority, it should listen to the leaders of the military:

We should carry out all the necessary tests under the supervision and the judgment of the Secretary of Defense....Too often the Congress of the United States micromanages the affairs of the military while it fails to listen to them. We should pay close attention to the uniformed military leaders who are going to be required to implement this policy before we take a draconian measure of the kind contemplated in the Roth-Kennedy amendment. We should at least take into consideration the fact that they have raised a long series of flags of caution. The majority of our military leaders are not saying "no" to women in combat roles. What they are saying is give us the time to study this issue and work out the full implications of any major change (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11422).

Senators Glenn, McCain, Nunn, and Warner each called for careful and systematic study and procedures before attempting to open any combat billets to women. They thought the Roth/Kennedy amendment was too hasty and would not constitute the best course of action.

At the end of the debates, the issue of the draft was briefly discussed. Throughout this whole process, the question of whether women would or should be made eligible for the draft if they were assuming combat roles was touched on and mentioned but not necessarily answered. ADM Kelso, former Chief of Naval Operations, spoke of his testimony before the SASC:

[Senator] Nunn asked the question, 'what do we do if we have the draft?' and I told them if you have equal opportunity you ought to have equal responsibility. It's not many times you can hear a pin drop in one of those hearings, but you could have heard it because no one had ever really thought about it. But they just went on and no one has ever really answered the question (F. Kelso, interview, 2 February 2000).

And former Congresswoman Schroeder commented, "Well it was never resolved because we still have a volunteer force; we don't have a draft" (P. Schroeder, interview, 1 March 2000).

After the Senators discussed the women-in-combat issue, they held a vote. But because neither bill was a substitute for the other, the members voted on both amendments. This is how GEN Punaro explained the situation:

Senator Nunn decided to go ahead and give them the up or down vote. That pretty much dictated the outcome, because our amendment [No. 949] passed with 96 votes. We got the first vote, so the way the procedure was set up was, Roth and Kennedy offered their amendment; McCain and Glenn offered their amendment. No second-degree amendments to either amendment. So, under the unanimous consent, Glenn and McCain could not offer a substitute for the Kennedy and Roth amendment. The Glenn [et al. Amendment] got the first vote and got 96 votes, so everybody that was going to vote for the Roth/Kennedy also voted for the Glenn amendment. However, since it was not a substitute, the Roth/Kennedy was still pending. Glenn moved to table, didn't get a majority vote [30-69 (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991)]...that meant the amendment was still pending and then they just voice voted it through. So they voted for both amendments. The Senate bill that went to the House contained both amendments (A. Punaro, interview, 29 December 1999).

The bill was then sent to conference committee, where its differences had to be reconciled with those of the bill passed in the House. But such reconciliation was not easy. "At the end there is a time when the members can't agree on some issues....This one was one of the final issues to be resolved for that committee" (K. Heath, interview, 17 February 2000). The compromise that was reached and adopted into Public Law 102-190 was for a complete repeal, together with the commission.

### C. PRESIDENTIAL COMMISSION

The Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, originally proposed as part of Amendment No. 949 (and created out of Public Law 102-190), was to study the possible implications of placing women in combat. Senator Warner explained that it would be:

Not just another commission, Mr. President [the Presiding Officer]; I mean one designated by the President of the United States – which is the commission that should have the greatest power of any – designated by the President and charged by the President specifically to make a series of findings and those findings to be made known not only to the executive branch but to the Congress so that we can move ahead on this issue, hopefully giving women greater responsibility (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991, p. 11413).

Chaired by General Robert Herres, USAF (Ret.), former Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Space Command and Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces first convened in April 1992 and submitted its final recommendations to the President on 15 November of the same year. The Commission members were varied in backgrounds and ideologies, with many being vocal critics of women in combat. This caused their collective appointment to be met with great criticism. Several comments emphasize this point: “Apparently, the White House disregarded the Secretary of Defense’s and Congress’s nominations of several distinguished individuals of recognized competence, experience, and objectivity” (Lawrence, 1993, p. 48); the Commission was “very political and objectivity was suspect” (Dunivin, 1997, p. 8); “there were five very conservative members...who were trying to establish a conservative agenda” (G. Sadler, interview, 1 February 2000); and



the *Washington Post* referred to the Commission and its final report as “a partisan mess” (as cited in Lawrence, 1993, p. 51). Two of the commissioners also expressed frustration with the political nature of the Commission. BGEN Thomas Draude, USMC, wrote: “I believe...objectivity was not the goal of every Commissioner” (Presidential Commission, 1992, p. 104). And MGEN Mary Clarke, USA, observed: “Early on in the deliberations, it became clear that a number of the Commissioners had come with a set agenda and no amount of facts or testimony would change their minds” (Presidential Commission, 1992, p. 98).

The Commission was comprised of fifteen members, divided in a number of ways. Eight of the fifteen had served in the military and only one of the eight had strategic or tactical aviation experience. Nine of the commissioners were men. Five of the fifteen were described by some as “arch-conservatives,” five or six would have been considered more liberal, and the remaining four or five were considered somewhat neutral. (Lawrence, 1993; Donnelly, 1993; Gruenwald, 1997; G. Sadler, interview, 1 February 2000). The Commissioners were as follows:

1. General Robert Herres, USAF (Ret.) (Committee Chairman) – former Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Space Command; former Vice Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff
2. MGEN Mary Clarke, USN (Ret.) – former Director of the Women’s Army Corps; former Vice Chair of DACOWITS
3. BGEN Samuel Cockerham, USA (Ret.) – veteran of the Korean and Vietnam Wars

4. Elaine Donnelly – former member of DACOWITS; frequent writer on the subject of women in the military
5. BGEN Thomas Draude, USMC (Ret.) – veteran of the Vietnam War and Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm
6. CAPT Mimi Finch, USA - helicopter pilot
7. Dr. Darryl Henderson, retired Research Fellow, National War College
8. ADM James R. Hogg, USN (Ret.) – United States representative to the NATO Military Committee; former Commander in Chief, U.S. Seventh Fleet
9. Newton N. Minow, former head of the Federal Communications Commission
10. Dr. Charles Moskos – military sociologist
11. Meredith A. Nezer – former Chair of DACOWITS
12. Kate Walsh O’Beirne – from the conservative Heritage Foundation
13. COL Ronald Ray, USMCR – former Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Guard/Reserve Readiness and Training; veteran of the Vietnam War
14. GEN Maxwell Thurmond, USA (Ret.) – former Vice Chief of Staff, Army
15. Sara F. White – senior NCO in the Air Force Reserve

The Commission held months of hearings and debates, and a great deal of animosity surfaced between the members. “Commission discussions quickly became contentious and often acrimonious,” Lawrence observes, “precluding any possibility of developing objective, consensus positions on issues” (Lawrence, 1993, p. 48). Because the members could not come to consensus, the Commission resorted to majority vote for its recommendations (Dunivin, 1997). A group of five “arch-conservatives” (Cockerham,

Donnelly, O'Beirne, Ray, and White) walked out of the meeting and refused to participate in proceedings until the other members had agreed to allow the conservatives to publish their dissenting views as part of the Commission's report.

The Commissioners voted and reported on 17 issues, making specific recommendations based on the majority vote. The following results are of note to this research:

*Question:* In view of American military history, experience of war, and religious and cultural values, should the U.S. under any circumstances assign any servicewomen to any combat position, on land, at sea, or in the air? *Recommendation:* Yes. Military readiness should be the driving concern regarding assignment policies; there are circumstances under which women might be assigned to combat positions. *Vote:* 8/1/1 (Agree/Disagree/Abstain).

*Question:* Should the existing service policies restricting the assignment of servicewomen with respect to ground combat MOS/specialties be retained, modified, rescinded, or codified? *Recommendation:* The sense of this Commission is that women should be excluded from direct land combat units and positions. Further, the Commission recommends that the existing service policies concerning direct land combat exclusions be codified. *Vote:* 10/0/2 (Agree/Disagree/Abstain).

*Question:* Should the existing service policies restricting the assignment of servicewomen with respect to aircraft be retained, modified, rescinded, or codified? *Recommendation:* ...Current DoD and Service policies with regard to Army, Air Force, and Navy aircraft on combat missions should be retained and codified... *Vote:* 8/7/0 (Agree/Disagree/Abstain).

*Question:* Should the combatant vessel exclusions (law and policy) be retained, modified, or rescinded/repealed? Should the current policy be modified to conform with existing law? *Recommendation:* Repeal existing laws and modify Service policies for servicewomen to serve on combatant vessels except submarines and amphibious vessels. *Vote:* 8/6/1 (Agree/Disagree/Abstain). (Presidential Commission, 1992, p. 22-33).

These results were surprising in light of the fact that, in addition to establishing the Commission, Congress had fully repealed aviation combat exclusion laws with Public Law 102-190. "The fact that the Commission could not come to the same conclusion as the Congress and Secretary of Defense," writes Skaine, "is disturbing and gives some indication as to why it was so contentious" (Skaine, 1999, p. 101). The conclusions of the Commission were inconsistent, as there was a recommendation made *against* women in combat aircraft, *for* women on combat ships, and *for* the Department of Defense to have latitude to decide when military necessity dictates the use of women in certain positions (Presidential Commission, 1992). Despite the recommendations, however, no clear consensus emerged with regard to the issues, and "the commission reflected society's division over the issue of women in combat. As a politicized decision-making body, the commission's report reflected this ideological clash" (Dunivin, 1997, p. 9).

The public's reaction to the report was generally unfavorable because of its inconclusive and seemingly contradictory recommendations (Lawrence, 1993). President Bush mostly ignored the report and passed it on to Congress without an endorsement (Gruenwald, 1997; Women in the Military, 1997). After President Clinton was inaugurated, he and the new Secretary of Defense rescinded combat exclusions for women "without justification and contrary to the recommendations of the [Commission]" (Hearings Needed, 1994, p. 1). Congress did not publicly hear from the Commission, and the sole Congressional hearing after the changes was limited to a three-member panel that supported the Administration's changes. Conservatives contend that the military bowed

to political pressures in blindly accepting and implementing the changes (Gruenwald, 1997).

Elaine Donnelly takes the alternate view and argues that the Commission did the best it could in the short time allotted. "If one of two votes had gone another way, would the Commission have been praised instead [of being attacked] – as the most enlightened 'conservative' advisory group of its kind?" (Donnelly, 1993, p. 56). It seems that even though it was Congress's way of thoroughly studying the effects of women in combat, the Commission remained controversial until the report was sent to the archives.

#### **D. FOLLOW-UP**

After Congress's decision in 1991, but before the Presidential Commission had completed its study, the Department of Defense came under pressure to implement changes. Chris Jehn, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Force Management and Personnel, testified to Congress that "This is a major change, a serious one that we want to do correctly" (as cited in Maze, 1992, p. 10). He explained that no women would be assigned to combat aircraft until the Commission made its report about women in the armed forces. Once the study was completed, it would be up to the services to set policy under the direction of the Secretary of Defense. Elaine Donnelly criticized the pressure, arguing that the proponents' major concern was not military readiness but the "advancement of liberal-feminist causes and social experimentation in the military" (Maze, 1992, p. 10). The military did take its time, however, and waited until the Commission issued its final report.

It is unclear whether President Clinton and Secretary of Defense Aspin read or heeded the Presidential Commission Report, but on 28 April 1993, Clinton ordered the services to open combat aviation billets to women and to investigate further opportunities for women to serve in additional billets. Secretary Aspin presented the change as a way to ensure an effective and ready military force. A copy of Secretary Aspin's directive is contained in the Appendix.

The fact that the opening of combat aviation billets went against the Presidential Commission's recommendations caused a great deal of controversy. As Bird observes:

The decision to let women fly warplanes overrides the recommendation of a presidential commission, which said late last year that women should be allowed to serve on more types of Navy ships but should not be allowed to fly combat aircraft or serve in ground combat units. The Defense Department "seems to have largely ignored the \$4 million study," said Kate O'Beirne, a member of the commission appointed by then-President Bush (Bird, 1993, p. 3,6).

The same was no less true about the Commission report, the time taken to prepare it, and the delay it caused in the entire process. Frustration and criticism abounded. CAPT Sadler (interview, 1 February 2000) said: "This report gets sent to the White House after Bush has been defeated. He just forwarded it with no comments at all. It got over to the Hill, you still had a democratic Congress over there, and it went to either the trash can or the back of the bookcase; you've never seen anything disappear so fast in all your life."

Regardless of the effect of the Commission report, the military was charged with moving forward on the issue and implementing the changes.

## E. PARTY POLITICS

The role Party politics or politics in general had on this decision is interesting. As one person (who wished to remain anonymous) commented: "This decision was politics at its best or politics at its worst, depending on how you look at it." As previously mentioned, there was no clear evidence of partisan voting in either the House or the Senate; however, there was a belief that both votes were more along age or generational lines. As Carolyn Becraft observes: "It was truly a bipartisan vote, but you could really see a clear age differentiation. I did an analysis and it really was more by age. Vietnam era and later voted for repeal. WWII folks did not" (C. Becraft, interview, 3 February 2000). Pat Schroeder agrees: "It really was a generational thing more than anything else" (P. Schroeder, interview, 3 March 2000).

The politics associated with Congress's being a public institution were present as always. The members seemed greatly interested in public opinion as they tried to balance both sides of the issue. On the one hand, they were concerned about being labeled as a "women's libber" if they supported the legislation; on the other hand, they did not want to be seen by their constituents as being "anti-women" (P. Schroeder, interview 1 March 2000; C. A. Punaro, interview, 29 December 1999). Lorraine Dusky (1991, p. 64-65), in her article "Women Are Capable of Serving in Combat," quotes former Congresswoman Schroeder: "No politician wants to see that 30-second negative [television] ad that accuses him of putting your mother into combat boots."

Public opinion on this issue played a big part in the debates. Many different polls, studies, and reports were quoted as Congress tried to gain an idea of how Americans felt

about the proposed legislation. Lucinda Joy Peach (1994, p. 172-173) states: "The Department of Defense...has suggested that the real basis for the exclusion is the will of the American people....In the past, such arguments were supported by public opinion polls of both military and civilian populations. This rationale for excluding women from combat is fast becoming obsolete, however." Dusky (1991, p. 65) referenced a 1989 report from the General Accounting Office to Congress, which called combat exclusion "the greatest impediment women face" in advancement in the military. Such opinions and pressures were known to members of Congress, and in testimony they even referred to such studies and polls to play on the support of the American people (National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991).

After the decision was made, some criticized the role of politics in both Congress and the military. COL Owens (1992, p. 36) observes: "Congress has changed the law, but left the decision to implement any changes to the Defense bureaucracy, which means that, as usual, members can avoid being held accountable for the outcome." An *Air Force Times* article said, "[Director of the Center for Cultural Conservatism William] Lind called Pentagon Leaders 'gutless' for pandering to political pressure to open combat positions to women, saying the leaders were worried more about keeping their budgets fat than maintaining the best fighting force" (Seigle, 1992, p. 18). Finally, a report by *Congressional Quarterly* offered: "Some conservatives, on the other hand, contend that the military has bowed to political pressure from Congress and from feminist activists who want to use the military to pursue a social agenda" (Women in the Military, 1997, p.



1965). The controversies seemed to show that no one group wanted full responsibility for making such a change.

The storm of criticism did not end there, as noted in the previous sections. The Presidential Commission itself was highly controversial and scorned by some for its political composition and its agenda. Not only was the Commission's report condemned for inconsistencies and an overly-conservative position, the Clinton administration was questioned for ordering women into combat aircraft and going against the Commission's recommendation (Gruenwald, 1997; Hearings Needed, 1994; G. Sadler, interview, 1 February 2000).

## **V. INTERVIEWS<sup>1</sup>**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

As the interviews were conducted for this research, a pattern emerged in fact and opinion that led to an increased understanding of how and why the decision was made to open combat aviation billets to women. Given the diverse backgrounds and interests of the interviewees, such a coherent and consistent view was surprising and encouraging.

With few exceptions and minor differences, the interviewees believed that removal of the combat aviation exclusion laws was both an evolutionary and revolutionary event. Interviewees agree that the history of women in the military had been slowly leading toward more and more expanded opportunities; however, the legislation might not have passed without the timing of many factors that came together at once to support it.

### **B. THE INITIAL EVOLUTION**

The evolution portion of expanded opportunities for women in combat aircraft began in earnest when the first women were allowed into Naval Aviation. As women fought for equality and respect, CAPT Mariner observes, "it was very obvious during my first year that if you did not get rid of this combatant/non-combatant distinction, there would never be any equality." The stage was set for female aviators and female military

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, information and direct quotes in this chapter come from the nine interviews completed as part of this research. All direct quotes were approved by the interviewees. When names are referenced, the following interview dates apply: A. Punaro, 29 December 1999; C. Jehn, 17 November

members, and it continued to be expanded in the 1980s. The invasion of Panama was an instance where women were tested in their current non-combatant positions – how closely involved they found themselves in the fighting and how well they could perform under pressure. Society was also tested, and there was no great social outcry against women who had been commanders in Panama, which was “clearly an evolving role as far as public opinion was concerned” (Heath). Also influential in the 1980s, DACOWITS was able to “keep the ball rolling” in the face of an attempt by the Reagan administration to impose greater restrictions on women in the military, and women began to go to sea on non-combatant Navy vessels (Mariner).

All interviewees agreed that Operations Desert Storm and Desert Shield in the early 1990s had a huge impact (and possibly even a revolutionary influence) on the push for expanded opportunities for women. A number of reasons explain why this is the case. The first is that many women participated in Desert Storm, both because they made up a considerable portion of active duty soldiers and because the reserves (approximately 30 percent women) were called up. Said COL Lee: “The women in Desert Storm were so visible – it got harder to return to the normal state because we couldn’t deny they were there and doing the jobs.” Similarly, Karen Heath commented: “One of the good things Desert Storm did – calling up the reserves helped make people realize what the military was doing and that there was a war going on.”

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1999; F. Kelso, 2 February 2000; R. Mariner, 19 January 2000; B. Lee, 3 February 2000; C. Becraft, 3 February 2000; K. Heath, 17 February 2000; P. Schroeder, 1 March 2000; G. Sadler, 1 February 2000

Given that women were so visible, it now depended on their performance to determine how their participation would be received. ADM Kelso commented: "Desert Storm didn't hurt any. If we had a lot of women over there run away and get scared and not do their job, the decision could have gone the other way." Because the women performed well alongside their male counterparts, and because they found themselves at or near the front lines of battle, the opposition did not have as much to point to as far as the abilities of women to perform in stressful situations. Carolyn Becraft discussed the non-traditional accomplishments of women: "Desert Storm exploded all the myths; you had female prisoners of war and women who died, and you showed the Risk Rule was not worth the paper it was written on." Proponents of the legislation argued that women proved to be immune to protection from risk and that society did not react badly to women who were captured or killed.

All nine people interviewed said that Desert Storm played a large role in the timing and support for the legislation to expand women's roles in the military. The common sentiment was expressed by Karen Heath: "There had been an evolution over time, but absent Panama and Desert Storm, I don't see that the repeal would have come anytime soon." Similarly, Carolyn Becraft concluded: "The larger issue was the euphoria over Desert Storm, the way it hit home. It was fresh in everybody's minds. Had Desert Storm ended in August, the legislative cycle would have been over and the opposition would have had time to mobilize against repeal." ADM Kelso also believed Desert Storm played a big part in the decision, but he thought that the push for advancement of

women in the military had enough steam of its own and that "the movement was strong enough that it would have gone on without Desert Storm."

As the "euphoria" over Desert Storm died down, a great deal of pressure was placed on Congress by military women and equal rights activists who used the war in the Persian Gulf as evidence for their cause. ADM Kelso recognized that the female officers wanted equal opportunity and that they had a good case against discrimination because "we simply don't promote people in the military who don't have combat jobs." Following up on the success of women in Desert Storm and the attempt by advocates to further advance women's rights, Congresswoman Schroeder introduced legislation in May 1991 to open combat aviation jobs to women.

### **C. LEGISLATIVE AND POLITICAL ISSUES**

As previously mentioned, when Congresswoman Schroeder sent her proposal into the House Armed Services Committee, it was without much preparation or warning for the other members of the House. When asked if the HASC got caught by surprise, Congresswoman Schroeder commented, "Yes, which is what I hoped." The expediency of the proposal accomplished a number of things. Most members of the committee and the House had not given the issue much direct thought and were therefore forced to make a quick decision; opponents did not have the preparation time to establish a hearing or a grand defense. Again, Congresswoman Schroeder explained: "My thought was that we really needed to do something quick and fast if we were going to do it at all. And then let all the negativity happen in the Senate. And, of course, that is exactly what happened."

Carolyn Becraft echoed the idea. "It caught everybody by surprise," she commented. "One of my colleagues called me and said 'They just did this!' The members were caught absolutely flatfooted, as were all the advocacy groups."

Slightly different from the House, the Senate was able to mobilize both opponents and proponents, and the issue was debated heavily in both the SASC and the Senate Floor, as discussed in Chapter IV. A great deal of animosity seemed to exist under the surface with respect to the two different amendments proposed in the Senate. Although both amendments seemed to reflect support for women in combat, that idea was contested by four different people, saying that the Glenn/McCain/Nunn/Warner amendment was actually intended to kill the legislation without appearing to do so (Schroeder, Becraft, Sadler, Mariner). Subtle opposition to the bill emerged, especially among the older, more conservative, and more traditional members of Congress.

One of the intensions of this research was to determine which of the issues outlined in Chapter II were actually discussed in Congress. Although the House did not spend much time debating or discussing the issue, the Senate debates focused on two major topics, according to Chris Jehn:

There were two kinds of issues [debated in the Senate Armed Services Committee]. One of the issues centered around a woman's capability to do the job, physically, intellectually, and emotionally in terms of necessary aggression, willingness to kill, and the like. Sometimes discussions were fairly sophisticated and fairly intellectual, other times they were fairly indirect and emotional. And the other big area was the general question of the effect women would have on the morale and cohesion of the units to which they were assigned....You can pretty much lump all the issues into those two bins.

The next group of ideas arising from the interviews concerned why and how the legislation actually made it through the House and the Senate, and did so relatively easily. One reason given was the ability of supporting legislators (Senator Roth was key in this instance), military women, and women's activist groups to mobilize and organize quickly. In two weeks' time, they went door-to-door to talk to each of the Senators. As Carolyn Becraft states: "We had to mobilize these groups – the women's groups and the military women – and I set up a network, a letter-writing campaign. And then it got to the point where the individual women had to pitch their own cases. If the women had been passive, it would not have passed." Four other possible reasons exist for the ease in the Senate. First, the procedure the Senate adopted when discussing this issue facilitated the passing of both amendments. According to GEN Punaro: "I believe, going back in the record, the procedure dictated some of the outcomes....The Congressional Record states 'That both amendments be pending concurrently,' so they're both up for debate at the same time, which was unusual." The second reason, according to GEN Punaro, was that the Senators saw this issue as inevitable:

I think the votes reflect the inevitability of the outcome of the issue...You see a lot of issues coming your way over the years, and you can spot a freight train when it is going five miles an hour and you can spot a freight train when it has gotten up to 35 miles an hour and you can spot a freight train when it is roaring down the track. The House had already voted and approved it overwhelmingly and a lot of conservatives had voted for it, so this freight train had a lot of steam.

Third, the Senate focused their consideration only on combat aviation instead of trying to debate the more controversial topic of women in ground-combat units. A final reason offered for how the bill made it through Congress comes from Congresswoman

Schroeder: "In the end they [members of Congress] always want weapons systems more than they want personnel issues. They will always cave on personnel issues before weapons systems."

Looking back on the time, key individuals agree that the legislators' job was a relatively easy one. Because the House had led the Senate on this issue, the Senate was forced to react, but it was not an issue that they seemed to dwell on. GEN Punaro explained: "This was a pretty politically-correct vote for the Senators because they voted for the Commission to study it, analyze it, and make sure they have all the answers. The Senate can then say 'Oh we aren't telling them to do it, we're just giving them [the military] the flexibility if they decide to do it.' So this was a pretty easy vote." Others expressed the idea that this was a relatively simple vote, as well. With the Senate able to put off making the decision by voting for the Commission, their job became fairly easy. CAPT Sadler saw it this way:

You have to remember the vote included having this Commission; I think what the conservatives thought was that the Commission would come out with a report saying "no, no, no," and it would come to the Hill and people would say "well maybe we'll change the law back." I think that is why the vote ended up the way it did. There just was no ground swell to stop it. People who in a sense really didn't care kind of looked at it and said "what is the big deal?" So the Senators thought they would change the law and have the Commission and that will take care of it. That is where the stroke of genius was about convincing the Senate they could vote yes on both those votes.

Chris Jehn agreed: "What they came up with was this Commission business. That was sort of their way of not getting trumped by the House but at the same time lending more of a deliberative air to the whole thing." Not only were the Senators hesitant to take full



responsibility for this decision, the Department of Defense initially seemed to be against the idea. But, because the decision could be put off until after the Commission's report, "the Senate had given us [the Department of Defense] an out – they had this Commission and changed the law at the same time." The House and Senate had made this decision to open combat billets for women, but had allowed themselves more time to study it by voting for and agreeing on the Commission. Although the idea of the Commission was not in the House's original provision, it was included after the conference committee.

Whenever the United States Congress deals with tough legislative questions, its members are subject to social and political pressures. Covered more fully in Chapter II, it is believed that Party allegiance was not a big issue and the votes in both the House and Senate were truly bipartisan (Becraft; Schroeder; Heath; National Defense Authorization, 31 July 1991; National Defense Authorization, 20-22 May 1991).

Pressure from constituents was intense, and members of Congress did not want to be seen (or more importantly, be labeled) as either "anti-women" or a "women's libber."

As GEN Punaro said:

I think some of the women perceived it as an inequity – that some of the Congressmen did not want to have it hung around their necks in an election....Some of the Senators were up for reelection and the House members were all up for reelection and they didn't want to have to go home and explain. That's why you shouldn't have defense issues that are 'bumper sticker' issues; they are much too complex.

He also commented more than once that the political power of the female vote cannot be understated; members of Congress are always wary of women's issues. Carolyn Becraft said, "Congressmen couldn't *not* pass it because they had just sent these women to

war....The people they had voted to send to war were the military people who voted in the districts, and they had to support the military.” And CAPT Sadler felt that the bigger political issue at the time was the debate over homosexuals in the military: “I think another thing that was helpful on this issue was the fact that the big personnel issue at the time was the homosexual one. When Clinton came in, that was the bigger issue; the other stuff on women sort of slid along with no one paying attention.”

The simple fact that a Republican was President when this legislation was introduced cannot be ignored. Chris Jehn said that President Bush had made it clear he was “not too keen” on the idea of putting women into combat, and no one at the upper levels of government seemed as though they wanted to champion this cause. Jehn stated:

I understood that we were not going to go out on a limb because of this. And furthermore, I think the President was speaking honestly. But if you were more inclined to make a decision strictly on political grounds, it's not a limb that a Republican president probably under that kind of pressure would want to crawl out on. The folks who would be most impressed and would like your stance would most probably never vote for you in any event.

So, when an issue that was not typically Republican or conservative was “passed” to the Clinton administration, it fared much better.

All of the interviewees who brought up the subject of the Clinton presidency were in agreement that the Clinton Administration would be more amenable to the idea of opening combat billets to women. Here are a few examples: “We realized Clinton was going to win, and at that point we knew in a sense it [the Commission] was not going to make a whole lot of difference” (Sadler); “My instinct tells me that Secretary Aspin and President Clinton would have done this independently of whether there was legislation or

not" (Punaro); "We knew if Clinton lost, we would be in big trouble. But he won, and it was just a matter of time until it was implemented" (Mariner); "I think, had Bush been reelected, this never would have happened" (Lee).

#### **D. WHY THE CHANGE? A FINAL ANALYSIS**

Notwithstanding the seemingly easy way the legislation moved through Congress, the general consensus was that many different factors had to come together to make this change possible. Timing was definitely the key; had the factors not transpired as they did, the combat exclusion laws might never have been lifted. CAPT Mariner, relating a discussion with Carolyn Becraft, explained just how true this was: "Carolyn Becraft called me and said 'this is the one moment of opportunity – the stars are in alignment and it is in the crosshairs and we may never get this shot again,' which I knew was true, so I went to Washington." And Karen Heath offered: "The evolution just accelerated [because of Panama and Operation Desert Storm], and there were some people out there with the foresight to say that now is the time to seize the moment."

Another consistent factor among interviewees was the current state of the military. There was a general consensus that, without women in the Armed Forces, the military could not accomplish its mission. And taking it one step further, without equal rights, responsibilities, and advancement opportunities for women, it would be hard to recruit and retain the numbers of women needed for the military. GEN Punaro said: "I think there was general recognition at that time that the military was going to have a hard time doing a lot of its missions if it didn't open up more opportunities to women." Carolyn

Becraft and ADM Kelso both offered similar opinions: "You can't maintain the All-Volunteer Force without women, and because of current opportunities for women in society, this is not a revolutionary thing" (Becraft); "The All-Volunteer Force won't work without women in the military. And it's pretty hard to say that if you are going to use this group of people to run the force, they shouldn't have every opportunity to participate" (Kelso).

The questions with respect to women in the military that were facing the leaders of this country in the early 1990s were incredibly complex. Whether from the military, Congress, senior leadership, or women's rights groups, each key person interviewed had his or her own summary of the entire event. GEN Punaro offered these thoughts:

I think [Senators voted the way they did] for a number of reasons. One, the procedural situation that existed. Two, the torch having been flamed and the fact that it had already passed the House with an overwhelming vote and people looked at the inevitability of what was going to happen. Three, they weren't voting to do it; they were voting to give the Secretary of Defense the flexibility to do it and they had just voted for this Commission and study. So I would say it was a combination of factors and I would say certainly the women's advocate groups on the more liberal side were pushing this very heavily. So they were stirring the pot. But I think the main thing was that an election year was approaching, and the sides and provisions were too close, so why walk the plank?...And I do believe that the political power of the woman vote was a fundamental reason.

According to former Congresswoman Schroeder:

To me it just seems so logical and so fair and so much of what America is about. And I think it was a lot of things – gradually breaking down the stereotypes, society's changing, the public's seeing women in new roles, having women in policy-making roles so they can push, and then just saying to people that they've invested a lot of money. It seems so stupid to invest money and train people and then not let them to do what they want to do. Finally, the one thing that we do not know – we never have a combat profile of who is going to do well in combat. The people you think are going to do great collapse; people you think won't last two seconds end up being heroes. The entire history of the military has been a surprise. So to say that women just can't take it doesn't really meet any of our science or our knowledge base. You just keep pushing the envelope and I think all those things kind of come together so you get a critical mass and it finally passed.

And there are two final things you should know. George Washington insisted after the Revolutionary War that the women who were in the military be paid the same. There is a Revolutionary officer or soldier, buried at West Point, who is female. They don't talk about that fact. Most of the women in the Revolutionary war who fought dressed as men and enlisted. But when they were uncovered, he said that they should get the same pay. And he also insisted that Martha Washington get paid because she spent all three winters with the continental army. It is part of the Congressional record, and I used to always say, he got it right. And it took us 200 years to get it back.

And ADM Kelso boiled it down as follows:

Put all things together during that period of time and you got the outcome that, if you sat back and looked at it dispassionately, you could have predicted was going to happen. It probably emphasizes as much as anything how strong the woman vote can be. My opinion is you got the outcome you got in the end because of a lot of things that were taking place that kind of pulled together and made it happen. This is not something that somebody said "I'd like this to happen" and out of the blue it happened. This was something that people had been thinking about for a long time, a lot of people believed in it for a long time, a lot of people had worked hard to get their ideas put in the right place, and it finally came through.

## **VI. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

### **A. SUMMARY**

Women have served the nation in every major conflict since the Revolutionary War, but their full acceptance in the military has only come in modern times. Presidents, members of Congress, military leaders, and society have all served to limit the progress of women in the military, but women's roles have slowly and steadily changed: from "Molly Pitcher" in the Revolutionary War; to women as cooks and seamstresses during the Civil War; to their serving as female nurses and pilots in the two World Wars; to women fighting near the battlefront in Vietnam and Panama; and, finally, to a visible showing in Operation Desert Storm, where women engaged in battle alongside men and were both captured and killed.

After the end of Operation Desert Storm in 1991, Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder introduced a proposal to allow women to fly combat aircraft and in combat missions. One of the more surprising aspects of the chain-of-events that allowed women into combat billets was the speed and relative ease with which the proposal advanced through Congress, given the years of controversy and debate over the issue. With tradition and history, as well as the Service Chiefs and many other military members against them, proponents of allowing women in combat somehow mobilized enough support to ensure that the legislation would pass. Caught off guard, members of both the House Armed Services Committee and the full House voted with little or no opposition to

support the legislation, and this was a big key in carrying momentum into the Senate. More debate followed in the Senate Armed Services Committee and on the Senate floor, but when the voting was complete, Public Law 102-190 removed legal restrictions banning women from combat aircraft.

In addition to repealing the Combat Exclusion law, the Senate followed the urging of Senators Glenn, McCain, Nunn, and Warner, and established the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces to study the issues in greater depth. The Commission, steeped in controversy, advised against allowing women in combat aviation, despite the fact that the law had already been changed. In 1993, President Clinton and Defense Secretary Aspin ignored the recommendations of the Bush Administration's Commission and ordered the military to open combat aviation billets that were previously closed to women. And in 1994, after Congress removed legal barriers to women on combat ships, Secretary Aspin ordered the military to open all ships (except submarines, minesweepers, and patrol crafts) to women.

## **B. CONCLUSIONS**

Many arguments both for and against allowing women in combat are discussed in Chapter II. Of the issues presented in support of removing the barriers to women in combat aviation, the ones that had the greatest impact on decision makers in Congress were military necessity, the Risk Rule's inability to "protect" women, and a strong push for equal rights. The success of women in Operation Desert Storm proved to be a hugely positive influence, possibly the single-most important factor in explaining how and why

the decision was made to lift the combat ban. The arguments that carried the greatest weight for maintaining the combat ban were the less-than-overwhelming support of any changes among female enlisted members, the unknown implications of the change on combat effectiveness, and the unresolved question of women's place in a military draft. Some of the other issues were largely overlooked in Congress. Parenting concerns and gender differences, for example, were left to the military to resolve at some future, unspecified time. And, despite all the arguments against women in combat that were based on readiness issues, Congress and the administration held a general "wait and see" position instead of seeking an immediate resolution.

As in any major political decision, politics played a small but noticeable role in the process. The votes in both houses of Congress were truly bipartisan; however, they were split along generational lines. Older members of Congress tended to support a continuation of the traditional restrictions on women, while younger members were more likely to support a change. Based on interview testimony, many members of Congress appeared to be influenced by the women's vote. Some members were perhaps even frightened that, if they voted against removing the barriers for women in combat aviation, they might lose the support of many women in their constituencies. Congress was strongly criticized in the press for its apparent reluctance to take full responsibility for the decision. Congress had gained some relief from accountability by establishing the Presidential Commission to study the issue and by leaving the final decision to senior military leaders (for "flexibility"). Similarly, legislators struck a small compromise by starting with women in combat aviation; opponents maintained a ban in other areas while



proponents were satisfied (at least for the time being). Finally, the Presidential Commission itself was accused of being a political tool, stacked with members known to be against advancing women's roles in the military. The Commission's final recommendations, however, were largely ignored.

The interviews conducted for this thesis led to some key insights. Operation Desert Storm was the main catalyst for a push in 1991 to put women into combat positions. The contribution of women in the war was highly visible, both because of televised news coverage and the fact that all states were affected by Congress's mobilization of Reserve forces. The Defense Department's Risk Rule, intended to keep women away from danger zones, was shown to be ineffective as modern weaponry and tactics caused the deaths and capture of female soldiers. For the most part, the American public reacted positively to women's roles and actions in Desert Storm. At the same time, top military leaders appeared to be more concerned in the early 1990s with fighting the Clinton Administration's proposal to allow the open service of homosexuals. It is quite possible that the battle to keep open homosexuals out of the military diverted the attention of those opposed to allowing women in combat—which had already gained momentum and was supported by popular opinion.

A final point emerging from interviews was how the timing of all relevant issues and support was key to this decision. The fight to expand roles for women in the military had a long history, but the timing had never been better than in 1991-1992. The arguably logical progression of women's responsibilities in the armed forces had been on-going; the next step could quite possibly have been breaking down the barriers of combat

aviation. Many events occurred in a relatively short period of time. In summary, the confluence of important events and factors included the following:

- More women held policy-making positions than ever before.
- Many negative stereotypes of women in the military had disappeared.
- Other nations had already begun to remove restrictions on women in combat.
- The expanded roles of women in society (e.g., as doctors, police officers, firefighters, etc.) showed women's capabilities.
- Operation Desert Storm showed that society was not against women in combat and placed the issue at the forefront of people's minds.
- Operation Desert Storm "exploded the myths" about women in combat, and the timing of the war's victorious end coincided with the Congressional legislative cycle.
- Operation Desert Storm made the women-in-combat issue "politically correct" and allowed it to be treated in a largely bipartisan manner.
- The expeditiousness of Operation Desert Storm and NATO's overwhelming success left the impression that, if it ever occurred, any future war would have minimum mobilization and minimum loss of life. This, along with the military's post-Desert Storm force draw-down, helped negate a key argument against removing the ban—that is, that women could be subjected to a draft.
- Congresswoman Patricia Schroeder's proposal to allow women in combat aircraft was sudden and caught legislators by surprise, cutting short mobilization of forces for or, more importantly, against the proposal.

- The power of the women's vote was seen as great enough to be a major consideration among members of Congress, particularly in 1991 and 1992, since 1992 was a Presidential election year.
- The House vote to lift the ban was overwhelming, creating a "speeding freight train" of support and pushing the issue forward into the Senate. (The proposal was offered up in the House as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Years 1992 and 1993, under Title V [Military Personnel Policy], Part A [General Matters], Section 512 [Repeal of Statutory Limitations on Assignment of Female Members to Combat Aircraft]. The vote was 268-161 [National Defense Authorization, 20-22 May 1991]).
- The voting procedure in the Senate during the women-in-combat debates was unusual in that neither Amendment No. 948 nor Amendment No. 949 was offered as a substitute for the other, allowing a full vote for both amendments. This helped dictate the outcome.
- The Senate was able to show support for women in the military (but avoid strict accountability) by "passing the buck" to the Service Secretaries and by creating a Commission to deliberate on the issues.
- Amidst pressures from many different sources, Congress compromised by opening combat aviation billets but maintaining the ban on women in combat vessels and in ground-combat units (at least temporarily).

- The issue of homosexuals in the military diverted attention away from women-in-combat, particularly among those opposed to lifting restrictions on women.
- The Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, widely criticized for its composition, offered recommendations that were largely out of step with popular and political opinion.
- The Tailhook scandal of 1991 helped convince the public and policy makers of the need for change in the military's treatment of women, especially in the Navy's carrier aviation communities.
- Bill Clinton, a strong supporter of women's rights, was elected President in 1992.

If these factors had transpired differently, or if any one had not occurred, the outcome might have been altered. Additionally, Operation Desert Storm was the "glue" that held it all together. Had women performed poorly, had the war ended later, or had society reacted negatively to women in combat zones, it is possible that women today would still be relegated to support roles, regardless of any of the other events or factors.

### **C. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH**

The interviews completed in the course of this research were thorough and provide a strong cross-sectional representation of key individuals involved; however, the study was limited by the inaccessibility of members of Congress, past and present, and by time and availability constraints that prevented interviewing more than one person per

area of responsibility. It is possible that other Service Chiefs, policy and legislative officials, or military members would have different opinions than the ones presented here.

Many opportunities for research exist in the after-effects of allowing women into combat billets. Enough time has passed that the decision could be reviewed from many different standpoints: career opportunities for women; military sociological issues dealing with the change; the effects of women in formerly all-male environments on readiness, cohesion, and morale; the success or failure of female combat aviators and surface warriors; and whether, in hindsight, the decision was beneficial to the military and its operating forces.

As a result of legislation removing barriers to women in combat and the ensuing policy directives, women today are serving in more areas of the military than ever before. No longer just filling limited roles as seamstresses, cooks, and support persons, women are now serving on destroyers, flying in B-52 Stratofortress squadrons, and catapulting off of aircraft carriers. Studying the Congressional proceedings that allowed military women to assume such roles leads to a more in-depth understanding of how difficult or sensitive decisions have been made in the past and will likely be made in the future. Congress must weigh a considerable number of factors, including society's views, pressure from constituencies, opinions of the President and top military leaders, the effectiveness or readiness of military forces, and issues of fairness, political correctness, and morality. Such matters were taken into account in the women-in-combat resolution, but as the interviews reveal, timing and momentum were the unexpected weights that worked to tip the scale.

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**APPENDIX: SECRETARY OF DEFENSE MEMORANDUM**

THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

WASHINGTON, THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

April 28, 1993

MEMORANDUM FOR THE SECRETARY OF THE ARMY  
SECRETARY OF THE NAVY  
SECRETARY OF THE AIR FORCE  
CHAIRMAN, JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
(FORCE MANAGEMENT AND PERSONNEL)  
ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE  
(RESERVE AFFAIRS)

SUBJECT: Policy On The Assignment Of Women In The Armed Forces

As we downsize the military to meet the conditions of the post-Cold War world, we must ensure that we have the most ready and effective force possible. In order to maintain readiness and effectiveness, we need to draw from the largest available talent pool and select the most qualified individual for each military job.

Throughout our nation's history, women have made important contributions to the readiness and effectiveness of our armed forces. Their contributions to the nation's defense have been restricted, however, by laws and regulations that have excluded them from a large number of important positions.

The military services, with the support of Congress, have made significant progress in recent years in assigning qualified women to an increasingly wide range of specialties and units. Two years ago, Congress repealed the law that prohibited women from being assigned to combat aircraft. It is now time to implement that mandate and address the remaining restrictions on the assignment of women.

Accordingly, I am directing the following actions, effective immediately.

A. The military services shall open up more specialties and assignments to women.

1. The services shall permit women to compete for assignments in aircraft, including aircraft engaged in combat missions.

2. The Navy shall open as many additional ships to women as is practicable within current law. The Navy also shall develop a legislative proposal, which I will forward to Congress, to repeal the existing combat exclusion law and permit the assignment of women to ships that are engaged in combat missions.

3. The Army and the Marine Corps shall study opportunities for women to serve in additional assignments, including, but not limited to, field artillery and air defense artillery.

4. Exceptions to the general policy of opening assignments to women shall include units engaged in direct combat on the ground, assignments where physical requirements are prohibitive and assignments where the costs of appropriate berthing and privacy arrangements are prohibitive. The services may propose additional exceptions, together with the justification for such exceptions, as they deem appropriate.

B. An implementation committee shall be established to ensure that the policy on the assignment of women is applied consistently across the services, including the reserve components.

1. The committee shall be chaired by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Military Manpower and Personnel Policy, and should include the Deputy Chiefs of Staff for Personnel of the Services and the Director of Manpower and Personnel of the Joint Staff.

2. Consistent with my emphasis on readiness and effectiveness, the committee shall review and make recommendations to me about the services' parental and family policies, pregnancy and deployability policies, and the appropriateness of the "Risk Rule."

The Service Secretaries and the chair of the implementation committee shall report their progress and plans to me in 30 days, and keep me apprised thereafter.

/s/

Les Aspin

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